

Al-Ahram Weekly
No 381 الاهرام ويكلي
Published in Cairo by AL-AHRAM established in 1875
11 - 17 June 1998 20 Pages P.T.75

Urging peace in the Horn

The Eritrean-Ethiopian confrontation has underlined the need for comprehensive solutions to African problems. Gamal Nkrumah and Dina Ezzat assess the implications

A senior Eritrean envoy met with President Hosni Mubarak yesterday to urge Egypt to step in and work for the peaceful resolution of the Eritrean-Ethiopian conflict.

"We appeal to President Mubarak to help peacefully resolve the Ethiopian-Eritrean crisis," said Eritrean Local Administration Minister Mahmud Ahmed Sherifo.

Sherifo handed Mubarak a message from Eritrean President Isaias Afeworki, urging Egypt, "to play a role in solving the dispute."

Afeworki's political adviser, Abdallah Mahmud Jabir, who was present at the meeting, said Mubarak extended assurances that he "would play a role to end the explosive war between Eritrea and Ethiopia and spare the Horn of Africa the consequences of this dispute."

His visit came as Ethiopia accused Eritrea of launching a fresh attack yesterday along their border.A government spokesman in Addis Ababa said fighting broke out anew near Shiraro and Badme, 300km west of Mekale, hit by Eritrean warplanes last week.

Egypt is concerned about stability, not only in the Horn of Africa but in the entire continent. For strategic, political and economic reasons, Cairo has worked hard to strengthen its ties with African states, a pattern unlikely to change. It features a strong Egyptian presence in all African forums, recurring visits to African countries, close consultations with officials, dedicated efforts to settling inter-African disputes and a closer involvement in the African economy.

This week, while in Ouagadougou for the 34th summit of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), Foreign Minister Amr Moussa reaffirmed Cairo's policy, which places emphasis on African stability, security and economic cooperation. In the Egyptian view, these are fundamental if Africa's 54 states, many of which suffer from ethnic rivalries and economic hardship, are to achieve prosperity.

Cairo is set on expanding its political and economic relations with Africa. But this may not prove to be easy, despite the fact that Egyptian-African relations have been especially warm since the 1950s and '60s, when Cairo provided support to African liberation movements.

One obstacle is political friction with Sudan due to the sometimes hostile policies of the Islamist regime in Khartoum. There are also "sensitivities" with Ethiopia, an important up-stream Nile country. Cairo and Addis Ababa have failed to agree on the division of water resources as well as political mediation to settle conflicts in the Horn of Africa.

Despite differences with Khartoum, officials in Cairo are not giving up on relations with Sudan. The same applies to the littoral states of the Nile Basin. Officials believe that, with mutual good will, existing problems can be contained.

But developments in relations between Israel and a number of Horn of Africa countries are alarming. In fact, the list of African countries, including some Nile Basin littoral states, that have close relations with Israel is growing longer. Some obvious examples are Democratic Congo, Kenya, Côte d'Ivoire and South Africa.

Egypt is also concerned about the implications of new patterns of Western intervention in the continent. Cairo, according to diplomatic sources, would like Western powers to define their role in the continent in a more comprehensive manner, and in close coordination with the OAU and other regional bodies.

The US attitude to the Eritrean-Ethiopian conflict may be a case in point. Resolving the conflict is a paramount importance for Washington. These two countries, along with Uganda, are the cornerstones of America's association of African countries allied against Khartoum.

A key development was an Ethiopian announcement on Monday that Eritrea faced "full-scale war" unless it accepted a OAU backed peace plan proposed by the US and Rwanda.

US Assistant Secretary of State Susan Rice cut short her visit to Ouagadougou, where she was attending the OAU summit as an observer, to shuttle between the capitals of the two warring Horn of Africa countries. She returned to Washington for consultations and is due back in the region next week.

The main feature of the four-point US-Rwandan peace proposal is Eritrea's retreat from the Badme area, under Eritrean control since 12 May, to its 1994 borders, and the reinstatement of the Ethiopian administration. Not surprisingly, the Eritreans have been reluctant to go along with the proposal. But Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi accepted what he described as "the compromise proposal" put forward by the US and Rwanda.

Rice, a protégée of US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, has explicitly stated that her main objective is a policy of containment of the Sudanese National Islamic Front government.

Eritrea, Ethiopia and Uganda are the three main instruments of Albright's Sudan containment policy.

The Sudanese umbrella opposition group, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), is based in Eritrea. Afeworki, who spent over 20 years in Sudan as a political exile, is familiar with the dynamics of domestic Sudanese politics. Eritrea, therefore, is an essential component of Albright's strategy.

But Ethiopia, too, is of critical importance. It has 58 million people and the region's largest, strongest and best-equipped army.



United colours

TUESDAY morning, Paris. Pablo, a 20 metre-high Native American is asleep at the base of the Arc de Triomphe. Moussa, obviously intended to represent Africa, is a little more awake. Ho is on the Pont Neuf while Romeo is lounging on the steps of the Opera Garnier.

At 6pm the four 20 metre-high giants — red, black, yellow and white — embarked on a tour of discovery of the City of Light. And along the way, cheered on by the crowds, the giants staged many a tableau. **Nashwa Abdel-Tawab** followed in their steps as they were joined by thousands of athletes, acrobats, performers on stilts, dancers, mime artists, trampolinists and, for some reason, mountain climbers.

By 9.30pm they reached the Place de Concorde, site of the spectacular finale, assembling in front of the obelisk which has been temporarily disguised as the World Cup trophy. The XVth FIFA World Cup was beginning.

Wednesday, 4.35pm, State de France. Paris continued with its celebrations. A football, placed in the centre of the pitch by two referees, begins to move. Gigantic flowers, 16m in diameter, rise from the pitch. Supporters drop from the air and as the excitement reaches fever pitch 3,000 balloons are released from the centre of a floating, exploding football. Thirty-two giant flags, representing each of the nations that had qualified for the tournament, are unfurled.

Whatever the outcome of this year's World Cup, Paris seems determined to enjoy itself as the entire city is transformed into a theatrical backdrop for what is, arguably, the world's greatest sporting tournament.

The opening ceremony, designed by Yves Pepin and cheered along by an 80,000 strong crowd, was watched by an estimated two billion viewers worldwide, proof, should any be needed, of the universal appeal of the sport.

And should a proposal made by the Egyptian delegation in Paris to FIFA be accepted, Cairo might find itself hosting similar celebrations, for Egypt has suggested an historic competition be staged between all the winners in the history of the World Cup. A World Cup winners' World Cup.

Meanwhile, kick off. And in the first match, between Brazil and Scotland, Gamal El-Ghandour, Egypt's referee at the event, has been selected as fourth referee. *(photo:AFP)* *(see pp.18&19)*

Summit talks

PRESIDENT Mubarak yesterday held talks with Saudi Foreign Minister Saud Al-Faisal on the possibility of holding an Arab summit to frame a united response to deadlock in the peace process.

Mubarak's top political adviser, Ossama El-Baz, and the Saudi ambassador in Cairo, Ibrahim Saad Ibrahim, attended the talks.

Following the meeting Faisal said he had relayed a message from King Fahd Ibn Abdel Aziz in response to a letter from President Mubarak and stressed that Saudi Arabia welcomed an Arab summit leading to a common understanding between all Arab countries. Faisal denied his country was mediating on the issue of resumption of Egyptian Iranian relations.

Earlier on Tuesday, the Saudi royal palace had issued a categorical denial that it had come under US pressure to delay the holding of an Arab Summit, AFP reported. But in a statement carried by the official news agency SPA, Saudi Arabia said it was firmly convinced of the need for coordination and prior and judicious preparation before the holding of an Arab summit. It was the second denial in two days that Saudi Arabia has issued over reports that US Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs Thomas Pickering had asked for a one-week delay.

Business on the ball

On the eve of the 1998 World Cup Peter Snowdon, in Paris, reflects on a competition where the biggest players are no longer those who get a kick at the ball

The obelisk of the Place de la Concorde must wish it had never left Luxor. Adrift on a dark sea of petulant Renaults and indifferent Citroens, it recently welcomed a host of unfamiliar visitors, a regiment of steeplejacks intent on shinnying up an impromptu scaffold to balance, on top of the ancient structure, nothing other than a gigantic inflatable football.

The World Cup has come to France — and don't we all know it. Close friends, distant relatives, long forgotten business contacts, all suddenly discover they can no longer afford a hotel room and turn up on our doorstep at midnight to beg a corner of a sofa bed or a spare mattress. The Persian cultural centre by the Canal St Martin has removed all the kilims and zarba from its window, and replaced them with T-shirts at FF120 extolling the virtues of the Iranian football team. Every Irish pub, every Japanese restaurant, every Tunisian tea shop, assures us as we pass that they are the only place in which to enjoy The Event in its devastatingly over-extended entirety. Our obligations, though, are not only to enjoy, but to be instructed. It is not even possible to take the metro any more without being forced to admire some revelation of pure Argentinean tango, or discover through a finger buffet the national cuisine of one of the smaller republics in Group Six.

While the country received the approved representatives — not more than 22 at a time — of 32 countries for their four-week activity holiday, the state was preparing to expel some 80,000 unapproved representatives of over 60 nations, many of whom may have helped to build the St Denis stadium, only to find themselves forced to occupy churches or declare hunger strikes in order to stave off the threat of deportation.

The various competitors are by now safely ensconced in the more glamorous suburbs, where they can be greeted by a "positive" image of France. The Jamaican squad has been housed in a rather elegant chateau, and TV news duly showed how the villagers, all of old stock, "spontaneously" dressed up as Rastafarians in homage to their guests — and in the hope of persuading them and their supporters to patronise the local shops.

Meanwhile in St Denis, where the finals will be held, the communist mayor is organising a continuous carnival to run throughout the competition. St Denis is not a glamorous suburb. Few people there have the influence necessary to obtain a ticket legally, or the money to buy one on the black market, where prices start at FF2,000 (LE1,000) for the early rounds and FF15,000 (LE7,500) for the finals. Of the 6,000-plus jobs promised by the organisers, barely 1,000 have materialised. According to one friend, who teaches in a technical school nearby: "The carnival is basically a safety valve. Without it, there could be an explosion."

Joao Havelange, outgoing president of FIFA and the man who has done more than anyone else to turn the beautiful game into a pressure cooker of financial aspirations insists that "football is power." It is also a global business which now turns over approaching $300 billion a year. The World Cup in particular is a license to print money, and as such is fiercely fought over, not only by the teams competing, but by host nations and multinational sponsors. Japan and Korea between them spent upwards of $100 million on their bids to host the tournament in 2002. Nike recently signed a 10-year $300-million deal with the reigning champions Brazil. The terms of the contract remain secret, but are widely believed to allow Nike to influence both team selection and the choice of opponents for friendly matches, thus placing their marketing interests before the technical needs of the squad.

Of the tickets for France 1988 that were left after the French Federation had taken the lion's share, half were allocated to corporations and other institutions. The BBC's reporter, using a hidden camera, even managed to film a tout offering him tickets which he claimed had been passed onto him for resale on the black market by the World Bank. When confronted with the evidence, the tout admitted everything, but argued it was only natural that a black market should exist, given the nature of the present system.

On Monday, Joao Havelange was succeeded as president of FIFA by Joseph "Sepp" Blatter. The World Bank, meanwhile, denies all allegations.

Weekly on line

On Saturday at 11.00 GMT, 2pm local time, *Al-Ahram Weekly* goes on line and can be accessed on www.ahram.org.eg/weekly


Mubarak marks his ballot card in the Shura elections on Sunday


Mubarak held talks with the US's Martin Indyk on Tuesday morning


Later on Tuesday, Mubarak met with Egyptian and Israeli peace activists

Summit in the making

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak said on Sunday that there were ongoing consultations to convene an Arab summit, but that it was as yet undecided what the summit's agenda will be. "We are waiting to see what our Palestinian brethren want, then we will consult with other Arab leaders," Mubarak told reporters after casting his vote in the Shura Council elections.

It was still possible to save the peace process from total collapse, Mubarak insisted, "we must not lose hope, we should not despair."

An Arab summit, however, "must be well prepared beforehand," he said. But Arab leaders must be in a position to reach an agreement "so that we do not appear divided before the whole world," he added.

Mubarak firmly denied that Washington was exerting pressure on Arab countries not to convene a summit conference. "I read about it in the newspapers, but there is no truth in it at all," the president asserted.

Mubarak reiterated his call for a global elimination of weapons of mass destruction. "These weapons are a threat to humanity as a whole," he said, and called for an international treaty for the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction within a period of 15 to 18 years.

The president warned that the recent nuclear tests conducted by India and Pakistan could "encourage non-nuclear countries to enter [a nuclear race], in fear that even by mistake they could be hit by such weapons."

In his statements to the press, Mubarak also called on Ethiopia and Eritrea to start "immediate negotiations" to peacefully resolve the conflict between them. "Fighting will solve nothing, only negotiations can."

Armed and dangerous

As Israel continues to sink peace-making efforts and defy nuclear non-proliferation, the region waits for US intervention. **Dina Ezzat** assesses the mood in Cairo

The continuing deadlock in Middle East peace-making could lead to the eruption of tension in the region. Israel's failure to deny reports that it is the only regional nuclear power has added fuel to the simmering coals.

"Even if Israel does not follow in the footsteps of India and Pakistan and conduct its own nuclear tests, the fact that it continues to have this nuclear arsenal, subjected to no inspections and no safeguards, is very alarming," one Foreign Ministry official said. "Nuclear seepage is now a threat to other countries in the region, which have all joined the NPT [Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty]."

So far, all efforts to alter this situation have failed. Sources say that, without serious US intervention, the situation is unlikely to improve.

Egypt, a regional leader, has voiced its concern at Israel's intransigence repeatedly. It has acted with determination to convey to the international community the incalculable risks of tolerating Israeli policy. "Israel has to join the NPT now, or the treaty will be devoid of meaning for the countries of the Middle East, and the credibility of the whole non-proliferation regime will be in question," warned Foreign Minister Amr Moussa.

Addressing the UN Security Council this week, Egypt's UN ambassador, Nabil El-Arabi, voiced his concern at Israel's continued refusal to join the NPT. He said the time has come for all concerned parties to support Egypt's efforts to banish weapons of mass destruction from the Middle East once and for all.

Israel, India, Pakistan and Cuba are the only countries that remain outside the NPT. The United States imposed economic sanctions on both India and Pakistan following their recent tests. Cuba has been subjected to American sanctions for decades. In other words, Israel is the only country that is outside both the NPT and the wide range of US economic sanctions. In fact, America is the largest aid donor to Israel.

"Furthermore, the US, like other Western nuclear states, provides Israel with advanced nuclear technology," commented an Egyptian official. "Even if this proliferation is subject to safeguards, there are no guarantees that it will not be transferred by Israel to facilities where these safeguards do not exist."

A nuclear state which is also driven by ambitions of territorial expansion, regional hegemony and right-wing extremism is a very dangerous state. And this is why, according to diplomatic sources, Cairo's concern over Israel's refusal to join the NPT is closely linked to its trepidation over the Netanyahu government's consistent sabotaging of the peace process.

Within this context, Egypt has been involved in intensive consultations to forge a unified Arab stance. These could lead to an Arab mini-summit responsible for formulating concrete resolutions on ways of balancing Israeli intransigence. Thus far, however, these consultations have not led anywhere. In fact, some sources believe that Palestinian, Jordanian and Syrian differences have become more pronounced in the course of the consultations. As a result, the idea of the mini-summit may be scrapped.

Another tool of Egyptian diplomacy is the international peace conference which Mubarak and French President Jacques Chirac suggested jointly. "Things are still evolving along this front. We are working very hard but it is not easy," said an informed source.

From the outset, Cairo has been discussing the two main regional concerns — the peace process and nuclear proliferation — with Washington. Meanwhile, Israel has consistently reaffirmed its intention to stick to its current policies on the two issues.

Israel has justified its nuclear programme, begun in the 1950s, by citing the lack of peace with the Arabs. "First they said they cannot denuclearise as long as there are no peace negotiations; then they said they cannot sign the NPT as long as there are no peace treaties; now, they say they will remain nuclear as long as there are threats to their security," a concerned Foreign Ministry official said.

The 1991 Madrid Peace Conference established a multinational mechanism to work on making the Middle East a nuclear weapon-free zone. This mechanism, however, stalled three years ago as a result of the Israeli position. The US, the main sponsor of the peace process, is not putting any pressure on Israel to show commitment to peace-making or nuclear non-proliferation.

On the issue of nuclear proliferation, in fact, the US attitude can only be seen as encouraging to Israel. During a conference held in Geneva last month in preparation for the next NPT review conference in 2000, the US seemed unwilling to take concrete steps to make the Middle East a nuclear weapon-free zone. An agreement on this point was part of a package that led to the indefinite extension of the NPT in 1995.

On the peace front, Washington was also unwilling to put pressure on Israel to end the 18-month deadlock by accepting a US package of ideas for redeployment in the West Bank. "The US knows very well that the Palestinians made important concessions by accepting this package and yet it is not ready to use its clout with the Israelis to accept it," a senior official said.

Moreover, the US has ignored Arab requests that it publicise the result of its mediation effort and put the blame for its failure on Israel. Instead, Washington continues to argue that there are still chances of convincing the Israeli government. On Tuesday, US Assistant Secretary of State for Middle East Affairs Martin Indyk told President Hosni Mubarak that the US is still willing to pursue efforts to convince Israel.

Egyptian officials seem to be of two minds about this US initiative. Some think it has a chance, while others are convinced it is dead and can only be resurrected by an Israeli change of policy.

Said presidential advisor Osama El-Baz: "At any event, we will have to wait for the Americans while they try; we cannot just decide to interrupt what they are doing."

Does this imply too much dependence on the US in handling regional concerns? No, argued one official: "It is just that US intervention is indispensable when it comes to convincing Israel."

'Peace offensive' hits Cairo

Visitors from Israel's Peace Now movement joined forces with Egyptian activists to rally support for a "people's peace". **Nevine Khalil** followed their activities

Egyptian and Israeli peace groups are attempting to whip up popular support for a lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Representatives from the two groups — Israel's Peace Now and the Egyptian Peace Movement — presented President Hosni Mubarak on Tuesday with a joint statement outlining their vision. The 90-minute meeting was devoted to discussions of the peace process and the obstacles Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has placed on the road to peace.

The Peace Now visitors also met with Mubarak's chief political adviser, Osama El-Baz, and Ahmed Abul-Gheit, an assistant to Foreign Minister Amr Moussa.

The Egyptian Peace Movement (EPM) is an umbrella label for the Cairo Peace Society (CPS), a non-governmental organisation launched recently. It is also the Egyptian chapter of the International Alliance for Arab-Israeli Peace (IAAIP), the group that formulated the Copenhagen Declaration. The IAAIP is considered the political wing of the Egyptian Peace Movement, and the CPS is the intellectual and research wing because, according to Egyptian law, NGOs are not allowed to be involved in political action. During this week's activities, however, EPM and CPS seemed to stand for the same thing.

The members of the Egyptian group include academicians, intellectuals and diplomats. Until quite recently, many, such as writers Lutfi El-Kholi, Nagi Qamha and Saad Kamel, opposed any form of interaction with Israel. Other members include CPS chairman Salah Bassiouni, a former ambassador to Moscow, Abdel-Moneim Said, director of the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, renowned lawyer Ali El-Shalakani, Islamist writer Abdel-Fattah Assaker and former ambassadors Taha El-Magdoub and Adel El-Adawi.

Peace Now was represented by retired Colonel Mordechai Bar-On, Chen Raz, the organisation's general director, university professors Arie Arnon and Dan Jacobson, playwright Motti Awerbuch and peace activist Yehudith Harel. During the group's 20 years of activities, representatives said, Peace Now has campaigned against the Israeli government's policies. More recently, it has been critical of Netanyahu's hard-line positions and has organised demonstrations at the Jewish settlements illegally constructed at Jebel Abu Ghneim and Ras Al-Amoud.

During their meeting with Mubarak, the Israelis were "assured that Egypt's leadership is working for peace regardless of the obstacles facing it," said El-Kholi. Bar-On said his group was "very much encouraged" by the meeting, describing President Mubarak's views on peace as "very credible, honest and articulate". "[The President] blessed our joint efforts with our Egyptian colleagues," Bar-On added. He said the statement issued by the two groups is a "breakthrough to convince public opinion that the only way for peace is through compromise and mutual recognition."

The statement was issued in the course of a three-and-a-half-hour news conference held on Monday to introduce the Israeli group to the Egyptian press. A large part of this conference was dominated by Egypt's Lutfi El-Kholi, who strove to explain and defend his group's dialogue with the Israelis. The nine Egyptians who signed the Copenhagen Declaration 18 months ago were ostracised by many intellectuals, who felt the Copenhagen group had taken the initiative of normalising relations with Israelis without obtaining any concessions in return.

Members of the two groups said they will "join hands in the search for ways to re-awaken the peace process". Their statement described Netanyahu's policies as "outdated ideological and misguided political preconceptions [which] constitute a great stumbling block". It also described "the yearning for peace [as] the strongest sentiment and the greatest hope which is awaiting fulfillment by the political leadership". The statement said that the two sides would work together to "mobilise the Arab and Israeli peoples in order to create renewed pressure on the political leadership in the Middle East to reach fair agreements".

The two groups outlined the framework within which comprehensive peace could be achieved. Its principal elements included the Palestinians' right to their own state on the basis of the pre-5 June 1967 borders, the evacuation of some settlements and the launching of "accelerated" negotiations on final status issues. It requested that both sides refrain from taking unilateral actions and condoning violence.

The Egyptian and Israeli groups said Jerusalem must remain a unified city, the capital of both Israel and Palestine; uprooted Palestinians and refugees of 1948 and 1967 should be allowed to return to the Palestinian state and receive compensation, and agreement on a permanent status should be reached before 5 May 1999. Finally, peace with Syria and Lebanon should be based on UN Security Council resolutions 242, 338 and 425 and the principle of land for peace.

Bar-On who, during a 22-year army career, fought four wars against the Arabs, including a spell as Moshe Dayan's aide in 1956, said that taking part in a "joint effort to bring peace to the Middle East is a great moment of finishing a circle." He asserted that he is "shattered" because his grandson is still required to join the army and carry arms against the Palestinians.

He said Peace Now activists aim to affect "the minds of the [Israeli] people" to change their perspectives on co-existence with the Arabs.

Chen Raz, the 27-year-old general director of Peace Now, said that his movement is attempting "to show the Israeli street's anger at what the government is doing". Arie Arnon informed reporters that his organisation "means every word in the statement; we are committed to it". He added that the signatories, who have been drafting the joint statement over the past year, "chose the words very carefully."

"We honestly believe that the Egyptian government and people are committed to peace," said Yehudith Harel, "but we needed to provide our people with proof [in the form of] the Egyptian Peace Movement".

El-Kholi described Peace Now members as "some of the bravest people and our closest partners to reach a just and comprehensive peace". The joint statement, he said, laid down the groundwork for contacts with other peace forces in Israel, "ushering in a new chapter in the history of the struggle". He stressed that "Arab public opinion must know that there are Israelis who oppose Netanyahu's policy and want peace, and that there should be joint action with these forces".

He called on intellectuals in Palestine, Egypt, Jordan and Israel to "launch an offensive for peace; to impose peace on the enemies of peace".


El-Kholi


Said

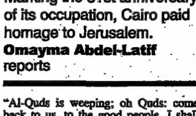
Bassiouni

'Arab public opinion must know that there are Israelis who oppose Netanyahu's policy and want peace'
El-Kholi

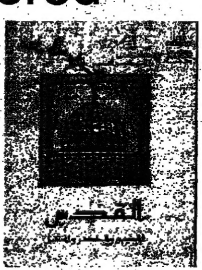
'We mark a conflict that has not been settled, an aggression that never stopped and a peace that, until now, has not been achieved'
Asfour



Jerusalem remembered



Marking the 31st anniversary of its occupation, Cairo paid homage to Jerusalem. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** reports



"Al-Quds is weeping; oh Quds: come back to us, to the good people. I shall come to you through any door and shall shout and the sky will hear my voice."

The lyric, written by Mariam Bakir, a 14-year-old Iraqi, bedecked a painting of the Dome of the Rock — one of 50 paintings portraying life in Jerusalem. The exhibition was part of a two-day event at the Cairo Opera House paying tribute to and remembering the holy city on the 31st anniversary of its 7 June 1967 occupation.

The event, titled "Jerusalem: past, present and future," brought together more than 100 Egyptian and Palestinian intellectuals and artists. "We mark a conflict that has not been settled, an aggression that never stopped and a peace that, until now, has not been achieved," Gaber Asfour, secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Culture, told the gathering.

Although the event was held under the slogan, "Jerusalem is Arab," participants opposed any discussion of politics. "Our case against Israel is not political because, theoretically speaking, agreements have been signed between the two parties," Yasser Abd-Rabbou, the Palestinian culture minister, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "Rather, it is the culture and art which unite Arabs and morally uplift the nation."

One step which will boost cultural cooperation and preserve the Palestinian identity is the establishment of the first Palestinian museum in Gaza. "Egypt has committed itself to establishing this museum to keep alive the memory of dispossession," Mohamed Ghoneim, first under-secretary at the Ministry of Culture, told the *Weekly*.

In addition to the painting exhibition, the event featured a Jerusalem poetry contest, a musical performed by the Palestinian Falouga folklore troupe and seminars on Egypt's historic connections with the holy city and the image of Jerusalem in Egyptian folklore.

The Falouga troupe presented a moving performance that brought back memories of the Palestinian *intifada*, in which children, armed with only stones, fought the Israeli military machine.

Although participants vowed that politics would not play a part in the event, politics kept creeping in. There was criticism of the Arab political discourse on the city, with one speaker saying it had been confined to resolutions passed by Arab summit conferences that do not provide a strategy for regaining the city, whether by peaceful or military means.

In response, an Egyptian journalist said that a basic tenet of Arab policy is the exercise of religious freedom in the city. Agreeing, Ahmed Sidki Al-Dajani, a prominent Palestinian intellectual, said: "All the people of the world should have easy access to the holy city to perform their religious duties, regardless of their religious affiliations. They should not face any sort of discrimination."

Al-Dajani said that the Arabs have made pleas to the international community that, in any final settlement, the holy shrines should be placed under the supervision of representatives of the three monotheistic religions.

Bishop Akram Lamie, a professor of theology, dismissed rabbinical claims that the return of the Jews to Jerusalem was the realisation of a Divine promise. This, he said, is an "abuse of religion" to achieve political and economic goals for the state of Israel.

Sohad Al-Qlibu, board member of the University of Jerusalem, warned that the Likud government "wants to cleanse Jerusalem of its Arab inhabitants." For the past 30 years, she said, Israel has prevented the construction of Arab housing in East Jerusalem. Arabs are being pushed out of the city and even land belonging to the university is being taken away, Al-Qlibu added. "Residents like us have been forced outside the city in order to be classified as non-residents of Jerusalem," she explained.

The seminar on the image of the holy city in Egyptian folklore was touching and dramatic. A study by Ibrahim Helmi showed that the city was a favourite pilgrimage destination for both Copts and Muslims until the 1940s. Dozens of songs celebrating Jerusalem and praising those travelling to the "city of Jesus" have been documented.

NDP sweep in pallid poll

The ruling NDP won a landslide victory in mid-term elections for the Shura Council, an upper house with no legislative powers. Gamal Essam El-Din reports

In the absence of the majority of opposition parties, the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) won an easy victory in mid-term Shura Council elections held on Sunday, gaining 72 seats, 22 of them uncontested. Runoff elections for the remaining 16 seats will be held next Sunday.

The majority of opposition parties had boycotted the ballot, arguing that campaigning for seats on a council that has no legislative powers is not worth either the effort or the expense.

The elections were a low-key affair. Many people on the streets were not even aware that polling was under way.

Interior Minister Habib El-Adli announced at a news conference on Monday that the elections were held in an "atmosphere of freedom of expression," with candidates and voters showing confidence in the impartiality of security forces. He said the balloting was not marred by a single act of violence.

El-Adli said that almost 400 candidates, including 17 from the opposition, contested the elections in 50 constituencies. Voter turnout averaged 52 per cent, he added.

The winners included Speaker Mustafa Kamal Helmi and veteran members Galal Ghorab and Adel El-Samahi, chairmen of two public sector companies. Although Helmi won uncontested, he decided to continue campaigning because his rival withdrew after a deadline for withdrawals had expired. Campaigning, Helmi said, provided him with an opportunity to open a dialogue with "ordinary citizens".

In his campaign, Helmi told constituents that the Shura Council had compiled as many as 120 reports on a wide variety of national and regional issues and held debates on 30 draft laws which had been submitted by President Hosni Mubarak.

Helmi was elected to the council in 1980 and became speaker in 1989. He is likely to be re-elected as speaker when the council meets in a procedural session on 24 June.

Oil Minister Hamdi El-Banbi was the sole cabinet minister to contest the elections. He won uncontested in Shebin El-Kom, provincial capital of Menoufiya governorate.

Albert Barsoum Salama, an NDP candidate, was the only Christian winner, gaining a seat for the Alexandria district of Moharram Bey. Salama is the general director of a construction company.

A relatively large number of businessmen, all of them NDP candidates, were also winners. They include Saad Hagras, a major importer of fertilisers and agro-chemicals; Heshmat Abul-Kheir, chairman of a private group of companies in Giza; Ismail El-Gammal, chairman of an import-export company; and Ahmed Sarhan, a Port Said businessman. Sherif Wali, a relative of Agriculture Minister and NDP Secretary-General Youssef Wali, was the youngest NDP candidate to achieve victory.

The Liberal Party, the only opposition party to contest the elections, charged that security forces resorted to arbitrary measures against a number of its candidates to tilt the election in the NDP's favour. None of the Liberal candidates won.

The Shura Council is made up of 264 members. Two-thirds of them are chosen by secret ballot in general elections while the remaining third are appointed by the president. Mid-term elections for one-half of the council's elected seats are held every three years. Half of the appointed members lose their seats every three years and are replaced by the president.



Seeing the light

Mrs Suzanne Mubarak had a busy schedule this week: launching the Eighth Annual Reading for All Festival, attending the graduation ceremony of nursing school students, inaugurating a new ophthalmology hospital and opening a training centre for the sightless. Rania Khallaf tried to keep up

It has been an eventful week for Suzanne Mubarak. On Saturday, she opened the Eighth Annual Reading for All Festival, intended to encourage children to continue reading throughout the summer holidays.

The Festival was launched in Ismailia, where Mrs Mubarak inaugurated its most recent feature, the Green Corner, which provides children and young people with an opportunity to learn more about the environment through a wide variety of programmes and books.

The aim of this new element, she said, was to promote a sense of responsibility for the protection of the environment. Backing up this message in deeds, Mrs Mubarak and a group of children planted a tree in the garden of the *Ismailia Cultural Palace*.

At the ceremony, Nadia Makram Ebeid, minister of state for environmental affairs, said that libraries will be provided with video tapes and computer programmes devoted to ecological issues. Short trips to nature reserves will also be arranged for children, she added.

Another focus of this year's festival is illiteracy, Mrs Mubarak said. "Certain libraries have been chosen to specialise in literacy training, teaching children and teenagers to read and write," she explained.

Mrs Mubarak returned to Cairo on a different mission. On Sunday, she attended a ceremony marking the graduation of a group of nursing school students, held at the Heliopolis Library, where she distributed certificates of merit to *outstanding graduates*. On Monday, Mrs Mubarak, who is also sensitive to the needs of children who cannot just choose a book from a Reading for All library, inaugurated a new nursery and training centre for young blind women set up by Al-Nour Wal-Amal, an association renowned for its long history of services to the blind.

Mrs Mubarak toured the new premises of the Association, expressing her particular admiration for the knitting, plastics and packaging departments, all run by talented students.

The new centre includes three different rehabilitation and training units.

Mrs Mubarak also watched a show given at the new nursery, which takes 30 children aged four to seven free of charge. At the end of the visit, she awarded special certificates of excellence.

Afterwards, Mrs Mubarak inaugurated the Nour Al-Uyoun Hospital in Giza. The state-of-the-art technology available there has earned the hospital its description as the most up-to-date centre of its kind in the Middle East.

The complex cost LE14 million, collected entirely through the individual efforts of the members of the Nour Al-Uyoun Association. The hospital will also provide services to low-income earners, at LE5 a visit.

The minister of health, the governor of Giza and other high officials attended the inauguration ceremony.

Azhar medicine debated

A controversial law that cuts the four-year Azharite secondary school programme by one year has been approved by the People's Assembly

Despite objections by several opposition deputies, the People's Assembly approved on Tuesday a new law that reduces the programme of Al-Azhar secondary schools from four to three years, reports **Gamal Essam El-Din**.

Even before reaching the Assembly, the law was the target of criticism by a number of writers on Islamic affairs who saw it as part of a Western-inspired plan to undermine the influence of Sunni Islam's most prestigious religious institution.

In response to the criticism, Sheikh Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Mosque, made a rare appearance before the Assembly to explain the benefits of the law. Tantawi was remarkably successful in mustering the support of the majority of deputies.

Tantawi began by recalling that, when he took office as Sheikh of Al-Azhar, he was surprised to see that thousands of students, especially in the elementary and preparatory stages, were leaving for public schools. He also recalled that he was provoked by the fact that the elementary stage included the difficult task of learning the 30 *suras* of the Qur'an by heart. "Students were never able to do this and did everything possible to leave the Azharite schools. I decided to reduce this burden and divide the memorising of the Qur'an among the various stages of education," he said.

To achieve this objective, he added, there was a preliminary suggestion that the elementary section of Azharite schooling be reduced from six to five years, bringing it in line with the public school programme. "I strongly objected to this suggestion, however, because elementary school is a building block of the educational process," Tantawi said. He opted instead for cutting the four-year secondary programme by one year.

Tantawi explained that there are other reasons for the new law. One is that the programme of Azhar-affiliated secondary schools in such Islamic countries as the Gulf states and Malaysia spans three years, not four. Another reason is that the retirement age of Azharite graduates is 60, the same as that of graduates from the public education system. "So why the discrimination, if graduates from the two systems retire at the same age?" he demanded. "As you can all see, the new legislation is primarily aimed at achieving equality and making things easier for the Azharite students, who suffer from the heavy burden of the curriculum."

According to Tantawi, the new law was drafted after the new curriculum proposed for Azharite secondary schools was closely scrutinised by specialised committees. "We want to offer students books with which they can fight terrorism and gain a solid basis of religious understanding," he said. Tantawi concluded his statement by emphasising that the new legislation will not lead to neglect of any essential Arabic and religious courses in Azharite secondary schools.

Tantawi's statement was preceded by sharp criticism and an exchange of verbal attacks. An uproar erupted when Ragab Hilal Hemeida, the deputy of the opposition Liberal Party, was given the floor. Hemeida referred to the recent campaign launched against the law by some writers on Islamic affairs and men of religion, notably prominent preacher Mohamed Metwalli El-Sha'rawi. "Some newspapers reported that El-Sha'rawi objected to the law, while others asserted that he had given it his blessing. Whatever the case may be, if this law infringes on any of Al-Azhar's rights, then I warn you that you will be accountable before God," Hemeida said.

Hemeida's "warning" to the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar was deemed highly inappropriate by the other delegates. Assembly Speaker Fathi Surour ordered that it be deleted from the session's minutes. He reprimanded Hemeida for his "misconduct". Joining forces with Surour, Kamal El-Shazli, minister of state for parliamentary affairs, said "it is unacceptable to direct any kind of 'warning' to a leading Islamic figure and highly venerated personality such as the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar."

Ayman Nour, speaking for the Wafd Party, objected to the law for other reasons. He claimed that Tantawi ordered the introduction of a new curriculum to Azharite secondary schools before the law was approved by the Assembly. "This undermines the Assembly's role and credibility," Nour said. He also suggested that the retirement age of Azharite graduates be raised to 65. "If the fact that the retirement age of Azharite graduates is currently 60 is taken as an excuse for reducing Azharite secondary stage by one year, then let's simply amend the law regulating Al-Azhar itself and raise the retirement age to 65," he said. Nour finally suggested that education at Al-Azhar should be restricted to religion. "In this way, Al-Azhar will be braced to play its traditional role of producing *great scholars* and *sheikhs highly* versed in Islamic studies," said Nour.

Sheikh Tantawi vehemently rejected the charge that the law had been implemented before it was passed by the Assembly.

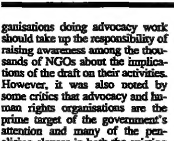
Criticism also came from an unlikely source, Sheikh Abdel-Aziz Shahin, an Azharite MP, who claimed the new law will foster "extremism" in Al-Azhar because entire subjects, such as jurisprudence and exegesis, will be deleted from the curriculum. "As a result, Azharite graduates will be quite useless. They will be as useless as ignorant doctors. The mistakes of doctors, however, could kill just one person or even a few persons, but the mistakes of ignorant Azharite *muftis* could kill an entire nation," said Shahin.

Surprisingly, Shahin changed his position after listening to Tantawi's statement. Speaker Surour read out a paper sent by Shahin, in which he said he decided to change his position and give his full support to the new law, "especially after I listened to the statement delivered by the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar."

NGO law continues to stir up controversy

The minister of social affairs will soon meet human rights activists in a bid to resolve the dispute over the draft NGO law. Mariz Tadros reports





As controversy over the draft NGO law continues, Social Affairs Minister Mervat Tallawi has scheduled a meeting for 15 June with some leaders of human rights and advocacy organisations for both sides to put forward their views.

It is the first time that the Ministry of Social Affairs opens a dialogue with leaders of organisations that are not registered with the ministry but classify themselves as non-profit civil companies.

Invitations to the meeting coincided with the publication by the NGOs of a position paper on the controversial draft legislation. Although many organisations expressed readiness to attend, they said in their statement that they want a serious dialogue — not one that is merely held for window dressing purposes or where NGOs are just there to listen to the government's position.

The draft law is supposed to replace Law 32 of 1964 which regulates the activities of some 14,000-15,000 NGOs operating in Egypt. Some of the draft's provisions also apply to all organisations engaged in developmental activities, including those registered as non-profit civil companies.

In their position paper, the coalition of human rights organisations said they will not be deterred in their struggle against the proposed law because it seeks to "suffocate civil society." The government, the statement claimed, had not responded to an alternative NGO draft law put forward by the coalition at the end of February.

The organisations asserted that irrespective of the position taken by the law regarding their existence and activity, they will continue to do what they were set up to achieve: "to liberate civil society." They urged all NGOs and members of civil society to reject the draft law.

A representative of an NGO involved in community development wondered how the 14,000 or so NGOs can take part in the coalition against the new draft law when "some of these NGOs are working in villages and hamlets and know nothing about its provisions."

It was strongly suggested that organisations doing advocacy work should take up the responsibility of raising awareness among the thousands of NGOs about the implications of the draft on their activities. However, it was also noted by some critics that advocacy and human rights organisations are the prime target of the government's attention and many of the penalising clauses in both the existing and draft laws apply to them.

Mona Zul-Faqqar, a prominent lawyer and a member of the committee that drafted the legislation, insisted that it was inherently liberal and respected the principle of freedom of association. She argued that the NGO anger was unjustified, adding that Social Affairs Minister Tallawi believes in a working partnership with NGOs and had planned to consult with them after the draft was finalised.

Zul-Faqqar said human rights organisations were not included in the drafting committee because "they are only part of civil society and not all of it." "If 30 of 40 human rights organisations are not represented, this does not mean that the NGO movement is excluded," she said.

Zul-Faqqar lashed out at the protesting NGOs, saying that they had been "totally misguided" in their response. "They have not looked at the final draft as a whole, and not in a spirit of constructive criticism," she added.

Mistrust has persisted between the ministry and NGOs for a long time, but now is the time to break this vicious cycle, Zul-Faqqar said. "If NGOs are dissatisfied with some articles, they should come forward and present alternatives," she added.

According to her, the most promising aspect of the draft was that it took away all the government's exceptional powers. Under the existing law, the government was above NGOs, she said, whereas under the new law, the two sides would be equal.

But Zul-Faqqar added that it was necessary to maintain some kind of government authority over NGOs, if only to "protect the public from some corrupt organisations." "It is unacceptable to have organisations knocking on the doors of the public, soliciting donations when they have no permission from the government to do so," she said.

"This is just it," responded Adel Abu Zahra, professor of behavioral science and head of Friends of the Environment, an NGO working in Alexandria. "The draft is formulated on the assumption that community workers are guilty until proven otherwise."

To register an NGO with the ministry, the draft requires members to present papers which prove they have no criminal record, he said. Abu Zahra added that the draft stipulates that if an NGO receives foreign funding, it must pass it on to the ministry to distribute as it deems just and fair among the various NGOs.

In an earlier interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Tallawi had expressed concern about the concentration of foreign funding in the hands of a few centralised NGOs. She said that there were many NGOs active in Upper Egypt and the New Valley which lack adequate financing but do not know how to access funds.

Although conceding that there was need to regulate NGO funding, Abu Zahra said that such a role should not be assigned to the government. "After all, this is a non-governmental activity," he said. "It would no longer be so if the government was involved."

For NGOs, the dilemma is exacerbated by the fact that even the Federation of NGOs, which is headed by a former governor, is regarded as more or less a government body.

According to a study by Saadeddin Ibrahim of the Ibn Khaldoun Centre for Development Studies, more than half of the 14,000 private voluntary organisations (PVOs) have annual budgets of less than LE10,000. Many of these organisations can gain greater assistance from the ministry, but they refrain from requesting it, he said, because "it implies heavier bureaucratic intervention in the PVO internal affairs under the pretext of protecting or auditing public funds."

Abu Zhara charged that the punitive nature of the new law can only suggest that "voluntary work is viewed with suspicion, as if NGOs are vested with latent self-interest." He added that the government was not against NGO activity as long as it was charity work and nothing else. "As an NGO working in development, you would be working to foster change, and that is seen as undesirable by the government," Abu Zahra said.

He raised particular concern about Article 11 of the draft law which prohibits activities of a "political nature." Abu Zahra said the provision could be interpreted in many ways. "Our NGO, for example, is a strong advocate of gender equality; it strongly promotes the rights of women," he said. Now, that is political. Will our work have to stop then?"

Abu Zahra had the same concern about an article which prohibits activities that are against public mores and traditions. "Some traditions are harmful and violate the rights of individuals," he said. "Are we supposed to bow down to them, nevertheless?"

Abu Zahra said that in any dialogue with the ministry, the NGOs should not compromise on any form of administrative intervention, including the appointment of a government official on the board. "We should not be treated as children, who need constant surveillance," he said. "This runs counter to all the claims that the ministry sees us as partners, because obviously we are not being treated as equals."

Pharmacists up in arms

The contentious imprisonment penalty was dropped from a new law regulating the pharmacist profession, but pharmacists maintained their fight against the new law. Gihan Shahine reports

While the People's Assembly was debating a new bill regulating the pharmacist profession on Monday, nearly 40,000 pharmacists closed shop and met in an extraordinary general assembly to demand the revocation of the proposed law.

Pharmacists were angered that the bill imposes heavy penalties, including imprisonment, for trading in unregistered medicines, chemicals and medical products. Before the bill was passed by the Assembly, the imprisonment penalty was dropped, but hefty financial fines were doubled.

In protest, the pharmacists decided to "halt for one month all dealings with pharmaceutical production and distribution companies." In effect, this means that they will refuse to receive fresh supplies, which could cause a shortage of medicines on the local market. Any pharmacist who fails to abide by the resolution will have his syndicate membership suspended.

The pharmacists' general assembly also decided to expel Dr Gamila Moussa, first under-secretary at the Ministry of Health and director of the ministry's pharmaceutical department, from the syndicate.

Also, the assembly objected to a decision by Ahmed Gweili, minister of supply and trade, authorising inspection officials from the ministry to search pharmacies. Members insisted that pharmacies should be open to inspection only by officials from the Ministry of Health. The general assembly vowed to question the constitutionality of Gweili's decision before the courts of law.

Pharmacists will meet in a second general assembly on Monday to decide their next step.

In its modified form, the law imposes a fine ranging from LE20,000 to 50,000 on any pharmacist who sells, displays or manufactures unregistered medicines, chemicals or medical products. If the same offence is repeated, the fines would be doubled to LE40,000-100,000. A one-year imprisonment penalty in such cases was dropped.

But Article 80 of the new law remained unchanged. It provides that anybody who runs an unlicensed pharmacy will be punished by a year's imprisonment and a fine of LE5,000.

The issue of unregistered medicines came into the limelight after the male potency drug, Viagra, was smuggled into the country to be sold under the counter at exorbitant prices.

But Health Minister Ismail Sallam denied that the new law was a reaction to the illegal entrance of Viagra into the domestic market. He said the bill was part of a larger plan to combat irregularities in the pharmacist and medical professions and to protect consumers.

However, pharmacists did not buy that, arguing that the legislation put them on an equal footing with smugglers and black market dealers.

The syndicate's chairman, Zakaria Gad, had earlier written a complaint to Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri. There were also reports that pharmacists had submitted a petition to President Hosni Mubarak, demanding that the bill be revoked.

"We refuse to be treated like criminals," Mahmoud Abdel-Maqsoud, the syndicate's general secretary, told *Al Ahram Weekly*. "Pharmacists are not smugglers. The Ministry of Health disregarded several proposals the syndicate put forward to terminate the illegal medicine trade."

Abdel-Maqsoud added that several medical products, such as gauze and cotton wool, are not registered with the Ministry of Health. "Should we get permits for such simple, yet necessary, medical supplies or be penalised?" he asked. "Or should we stop selling them?"

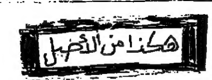
Others found the bill discriminatory. Ezzat Ismail, chairman of the syndicate's chapter in the governorate of Sharqiya, complained that the bill did not penalise doctors who prescribe the unregistered medicines. "The reason so many medicines are smuggled into the local market is that they are prescribed by doctors, although they are fully aware that these medicines are not registered," he said.

Ahmed Gibril, chairman of the syndicate's Alexandria chapter, for his part blamed the government's drug registration policy. "[It] has failed to meet demand and is thus directly responsible for drug smuggling, he said."

According to Gibril, a lot of basic foreign medicines, with no locally-manufactured alternatives, remain unregistered although they are heavily demanded. "We will have to either leave patients to die or face harsh penalties," he said.

(See p. 16)

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**



'A victory for coexistence'

Candidates backed by Prime Minister Al-Hariri swept the local elections in Beirut, while in the south, those supported by House Speaker Berri's Amal movement made gains over Hizbullah. **Zeina Khodr** reports

Election results of the municipal and mayoral ballot in Beirut on Sunday confirmed a victory for "national coexistence and harmony." The outcome, according to officials, shows that democracy has prevailed.

A consensus electoral list of 12 Muslims and 12 Christians sponsored by Prime Minister Al-Hariri won 23 out of Beirut's 24-seat municipal council, despite the low turn-out of Christian voters in the capital.

Al-Hariri described the outcome of the Beirut ballot as a clear indication that the war years were gone forever. "It was a victory for Christian-Muslim coexistence despite the fact that it was not guaranteed by law nor were seats distributed along sectarian lines," he said.

Unlike the parliamentary election law, which sets quotas for the distribution of seats in the half Christian-half Muslim legislature, the municipal election legislation does not allot seats for the country's 19 religious communities.

"The manner in which Beirut voted ensured a balanced representation in the capital's municipal council," Al-Hariri said.

The other main electoral list, backed by opposition MP Najah Wakim and exiled former leader General Michel Aoun, also had an equal number of Christians and Muslim candidates for Beirut's municipal seats.

Al-Hariri's coalition includes members of Hizbullah, Amal, the Sunni Jamma Islamiya group, the Christian Phalange Party and the outlawed Christian Lebanese Forces.

The Christian opposition had called on Christians to boycott the municipal poll, saying that the law was unfair since it considered Beirut one single electoral constituency.

Muslim clergymen and political leaders in Beirut had, however, called on Muslim voters to take into consideration the sectarian balance and vote for both Christians and Muslims.

There are about 200,000 Muslims and 177,000 Christian residents in Beirut, according to unverified press reports.

Last week's elections in the northern city of Tripoli were seen by observers as disrupting the Muslim-Christian balance of power in favour of Muslims. Christians in Tripoli lost several seats. Some observers attributed this to the fact that Muslims only elected Muslim candidates on coalition tickets while others blamed the low turn-out of Christian voters.

Local elections were also held in the governorates of South Lebanon and Nabatiyeh with a massive voter turn-out of between 65 and 70 per cent. Voters went to the polls amid tight security to offset chances of possible clashes between supporters of Hizbullah and the Amal movement — the two main forces on the ground who have over the years been vying for leadership of the Muslim Shi'ite community.

The two sides read the results of the poll in the south differently. While House Speaker Nabih Berri, who heads the Amal movement, hailed the reported victory of 73 lists backed by his group in 97 villages, Hizbullah spokesmen said there was no real victory in the south since both parties made gains in various areas.

Hizbullah MP Mohamed Raad said the results proved that "there is no one party that can claim to be the sole representative in the south and Nabatiyeh in local polls." He accused Berri of including non-Shi'ite villages where Hizbullah and Amal did not field candidates as part of the villages where Amal-backed lists had won. He also denied that Amal had forged alliances with other political groups as Berri claimed.

But Hizbullah also hailed its victory in the south and Nabatiyeh. "This is a good step forward for our group and it has allowed our party and other factions that allied with us, such as the Communist Party, to be officially recognised as important forces in the area," spokesman Nayef Krayem said.

During parliamentary elections in 1996, the two groups were allies. But this time around they failed to seal agreement on a consensus list to avoid a heated contest. They had announced rival election lists for various municipalities in the south.

During the first round of local elections in the Mount Lebanon governorate, Hizbullah scored an overwhelming victory over Amal candidates. At the time, Berri downplayed the results, saying they were not surprising coming from Hizbullah-controlled areas.

Berri had reaffirmed his independent stand in the southern round. The Amal Party said its decision to stay out of the local race and its call for consensus and coalitions was unchanged. "We want to set up municipal and not political councils," said Deputy Ali Khreis, a Berri ally. "Hizbullah is trying to politicise local councils by putting forward party members in the elections. This means councils will be split between those loyal to Hizbullah and those who want to promote local government."

But Hizbullah challenged Amal's claims. "Berri was heavily involved in campaigning for Amal supported candidates," said Hizbullah MP Mohamed Freish.

Several observers believe the outcome of local elections in the south shows no clear cut winner.

The daily *An-Nahar* said in an editorial that Amal victories did not mean the party was more popular than Hizbullah. "It means voters chose tickets backed by the authorities [Berri] since municipalities are directly related to the central government," it said. "This does not mean Hizbullah has less support. Southerners back Hizbullah's ideology and its principles concerning resistance against Israeli occupation."

Hizbullah spearheads the guerrilla war to oust Israeli troops from South Lebanon.

The last time municipal and mayoral elections were held in Lebanon was in 1963. They were repeatedly postponed due to political crises, the war and differences over a local election law. The last phase of voting will be in the Bekaa Valley on 14 June.



DISASTER'S EDGE ON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES: Israel's Interior Ministry gave the green light on Tuesday for the construction of 58 new homes for Jewish settlers on the Mount of Olives in occupied Arab Jerusalem, officials said.

The decision came a day after Jewish settlers took over four homes in another Arab quarter of East Jerusalem on Monday. Clashes erupted in the Silwan neighbourhood and at least two people were injured including Faisal Husseini, the top Palestinian official in Jerusalem.

"I see things getting worse," said Husseini, who has called for mass street protests by Palestinians to block settlement by extremist Jewish settlers. "This provocation is pushing the situation to the edge of disaster."

In Tuesday's move, the Israeli Interior Ministry's planning and construction commission gave final authorisation to the building of 58 housing units for a religious seminary set up on the crest of the Mount of Olives four years ago. At the same time, the commission shifted the planned construction on the site of a Palestinian girls' school to a plot of land on the eastern slope of the mount.

The Palestinians demand that East Jerusalem, which Israel captured in the 1967 War, should be the capital of a future state, while the Israelis claim the holy city as a "united and eternal capital" of their state.

Jerusalem's right-wing mayor, Ehud Olmert, claimed the settlers' move to Silwan on Monday was legal. "I don't wake up in the morning and ask myself what will please the Palestinians," he said recently. "People can buy wherever they want." In the picture above, Palestinian children in the West Bank's Jordan Valley wave banners, protesting the demolition of 45 shacks in the area while an Israeli soldier looks on. *(photo:Reuters)*

Emptying the valley

The lives of the 3,000 Palestinian inhabitants of Jiflik offer a grim testimony to both the past and likely future of the Jordan Valley. **Graham Usher**, in Jerusalem, writes

Despite living in the most fertile basin of the Jordan Valley (the Jiflik area provides 70 per cent of all the West Bank's agricultural produce during the winter season), Jiflik's Palestinians live in conditions of utter poverty.

Since 1967, their main domicile, nestled between the West Bank's eastern slopes and the Jordan River, has been less a village than an ad hoc encampment made up of mudbrick shacks protected by plastic windbreakers and the occasional corrugated roof.

The shacks have a water supply but "the pipes are disintegrating," says Mohamed Omar Jahalin (Abu Omar), head of Jiflik's Project Committee.

There is no electricity, forcing the residents to use kerosene lamps for heat in the winter and small generators to keep the flies off the food in the summer. For the entire encampment, there is one preparatory school and one clinic. "A dog in his kennel gets better infrastructure than we do," says Abu Omar.

One cause for such misery are the feudal-like property relations that still obtain in the Jordan Valley. Jiflik's Palestinians are either seasonal labourers or sharecroppers who work for the "elite" Palestinian families who own the 20,000 or so dunums that make up the Jiflik area.

As tenant farmers, they pay half the expenses for the equipment they use and receive half of all profits from the, mainly vegetable, crops sold. But they have no say over which crops should be planted, an economic arrangement that perpetuates low wages and makes the croppers vulnerable to any change in the vegetable market.

But the principle cause of the immiseration is Israel's policies in the Jordan valley. "Israel has long had a strategy of ethnic cleansing in the Valley," says Palestinian Authority (PA) Agriculture Minister Abdel-Jawad Salah. Whether the government is Labour or Likud, Israel's strategy is for the Valley to become a "purely Jewish" territory, he adds.

"By keeping hold of the Jordan Valley, Israel ensures that any future Palestinian entity will be separated from its Arab hinterland," Salah says. "And, because the Valley is a natural greenhouse with fresh water, Israel wants to keep such fertile land for itself."

It is not a new policy. Ninety per cent of Jiflik's Palestinians are refugees from the Beersheba area in the Negev who fled to the Jordan Valley in 1948. In 1967, an estimated 40,000 Palestinians from Jiflik were expelled for a second time across the Jordan River when Israel occupied the West Bank. Since then, Israel has rigorously blocked any attempted development by or for those Palestinians who remained. "We were never allowed to build houses or provide any services for the encampment," says Abu Omar. "[But] at least the shepherds could let their sheep and goats graze on the hills and, when all else failed, we could work in Israel."

With Oslo, however, even these respites have stopped. In their stead, Israel has imposed even tighter restrictions on Jiflik's farmers and shepherds. One new method is to declare "closed military zones" the traditional grazing areas on the Valley's hills. "The army simply arrives one day, destroys the shepherd's encampments and confiscates their water tractors in the name of security," says Abu Omar.

An even more insidious ruse has been Israel's use of the territorial divisions imposed on the West Bank by the various Oslo Accords. Of the Palestinians who work in the Jiflik area, around 2,000 are seasonal labourers who live in villages like Tubas and Tammun near Nablus for part of the year and in Jiflik for the rest. These villages, according to Oslo's taxonomy, are Area B, and so under the PA's "civilian" control. But Jiflik, like most of the valley, is Area C, under Israel's exclusive military control. Since Oslo's 1995 interim agreement, Israel has insisted that "B" Palestinians require permits to enter the "C" Jordan Valley.

"It's as though Jiflik were suddenly inside the Green Line," says Abu Omar. "Palestinians from Tubas have to get a permit to travel to Jiflik exactly as they need a permit to get to Tel Aviv."

The similarities don't end there. Israel rarely grants "overnight" permits to such workers, which means, effectively, that they can no longer tend their flocks or work the land. The result is a drift of Palestinians from livelihoods in the Valley to work in cities like Nablus and Jerusalem. According to Abu Omar, around 30 families, or about 200 people, have left Jiflik since the interim agreement was signed. The PA Ministry of Agriculture says there are similar rural to urban migrations occurring elsewhere in the Valley.

For Abu Omar, the goal of such restrictions is transparent enough. "[Israeli Minister of Infrastructure] Ariel Sharon's stated plan for the West Bank is for Israel to annex a 20km-wide seam along the Jordan River," he says. "And this is a plan the army is implementing. But before they reach the stage of annexation, they need to empty the area of its inhabitants."

Karbaschi on trial

Karbaschi

TEHRAN mayor Gholam-Hossein Karbaschi, who went on trial last Sunday for alleged embezzlement and mismanagement, is likely to be convicted, according to Abdolvahed Musavi-Lari, vice president for Iranian parliamentary and legal affairs.

Mousavi-Lari told the English daily *Iran News*, that he believed Karbaschi "would be convicted by the court." However, he added that no decision had been made yet about a possible successor to the popular mayor of the Iranian capital, who has been suspended from his mayoral post for the duration of the trial.

Karbaschi, who played an important part in the landslide election victory of the popular reformist president Mohamed Khatami in 1997, is accused of using municipal funds to help finance the election campaigns of moderate candidates during the 1996 legislative polls. At Sunday's hearing, Karbaschi defended himself, saying the funds in question were loans which were later paid back. But he said "there was no documentation accompanying the transfers."

Karbaschi, who has headed the metropolis of some 10 million people since 1989, is also charged with fraud, and "despotic and dictatorial behaviour."

"I reject all charges," he said. "They are all lies, and the qualification of the judge who levelled these charges against me is questionable."

Garang's moving targets

The escalation of fighting between government and rebel forces in southern Sudan forced SPLA John Garang to miss a major opposition meeting in Cairo, writes **Mohamed Khaled**

An escalation of military attacks by Sudanese rebels along a wide theatre of operations during the last two weeks has resulted in the capture of several strategic military sites south of the Blue Nile and in eastern Sudan.

The fighting explains why John Garang, leader of the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA), was unable to attend a meeting of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) hosted by the Egyptian government in Cairo two weeks ago. The meeting was postponed and has not been rescheduled.

Last month, the SPLA announced the capture of the strategic garrison town of Ulu, located 280 miles south of the capital Khartoum and 90 miles from the Damazin River south of the Blue Nile. According to the rebels, 300 government troops were killed and over 500 were wounded. On Friday, forces of the New Sudan Brigade (NSB), under joint command of the NDA, liberated the two garrisons of Shalalob and Haldit on the outposts of Kassala, the capital of the eastern region of Sudan.

Speaking for the Sudanese government, army spokesman Gen. Abdel-Rahman Sir Al-Khatim dismissed the rebels' claims, stating that "a battle is still raging with the rebels for the Ulu town in the southern Blue Nile."

However, in his comments to *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Yasser Arman, spokesman for the SPLA, confirmed the capture of the sites. "All operations are successful and well-coordinated," he said. On the strategic importance of the sites captured, Arman said that "in addition to Ulu, seven other garrisons were liberated last month in the southern Blue Nile region and a total area of 1,000 square kilometers have come under SPLA control."

Arman explained that SPLA forces were now advancing on two fronts: towards Damazin, where the Rosaires dam provides 80 percent of Khartoum's electricity, and towards the Adar Eil oil fields, one of the strategic economic projects on which the regime is counting on to overcome its current financial crisis." According to Arman, the sites captured in eastern Sudan are very close to the strategic road of Port Sudan-Khartoum. "The military initiative now is in the hands of SPLA and NDA forces," he added.

Despite the conflicting reports from both sides, the fact remains that fierce fighting along several fronts, initiated by the SPLA, is continuing. Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir declared a maximum state of mobilisation among young men last week, urging them to report to training camps and then proceed to areas of fighting.

The SPLA has received "tremendous physical and logistical assistance from certain foreign powers," Al-Bashir claimed. He did not name these powers, but Sudan has accused Eritrea and Ethiopia of sheltering and supporting Sudanese rebels, claiming they had participated in attacks on Sudan's eastern borders. "The current operations, while Ethiopia and Eritrea are involved in fighting each other, provide circumstantial evidence that refutes the government's allegations of Ethiopian-Eritrean participation in NDA military operations," said Arman.

However, chief of staff of the pro-government South Sudan Defense Force (SSDF), Elija Hone, and Khartoum National Congress Secretary of State Mutessim Abdel-Rahim, have stated that by attacking locations in the Blue Nile, Garang aims to steer attention away from his real goal of occupying Juba, southern Sudan's largest town, and the capital of the whole region which encompasses three states. "We are well aware of the tactics and plans of the rebel Garang," said Hone.

Garang, famed for diversionary military tactics that mask his true intentions, last year intensified operations in the southern parts of Sudan around Yei town while preparing to attack the strategic town of Al-Kurmuk, which he later took by surprise and occupied.

In another example of Garang's manoeuverings, Kerubino Kuanyen, a leader of a major Sudanese faction, disappeared from Khartoum earlier this year following an agreement between the government and a number of southern Sudanese military factions which did not include the SPLA. Kuanyen later re-emerged in Bahr El-Ghazal and succeeded in occupying large parts of the region's capital, Wau, for several days in coordination with Garang. The incident also brought into question the loyalty of the signatories of the Khartoum agreement and raised the possible danger of another Trojan horse among them.

In light of Garang's sleight of hand on the battlefield, Hone's and Abdel-Rahim's analysis sound reasonable. However, it remains difficult to determine how accurate their predictions are concerning Garang's intentions on Juba. The current situation points to a military surprise by Garang in the near future, but exactly when and where remain a mystery.

"It is not their [the Sudanese government's] responsibility to identify the SPLA's targets," said Arman. "Rather, they have to review their military failures and the reasons behind them." He added: "The SPLA does not discuss its military plans in the media, but if the government wants to prepare public opinion for more failures in other areas in the future, then that is their own business."

Freedom at last

The release of 200 political prisoners and human rights activists in Syria last week is being viewed as a response to local, regional and international changes. *Al-Ahram Weekly*'s special correspondent writes from Damascus

Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad last week ordered the release of 200 political prisoners, including left-wing and human rights activists. Among those released was Riyad Al-Turk, a leader of the Syrian Communist Party jailed in 1980, and Akram Nuais, a leading human rights activist imprisoned for seven years.

The rest were members of opposition and human rights groups and Kurdish activists who were jailed without charge or trial. A few of those released belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood group which was crushed by the Syrian army after a rebellion in Hama in the early 1980s.

Since 1995, Syria has been quietly releasing political detainees, indicating a change in the government's attitude towards its opponents. But analysts believe their release is also linked to domestic, regional and international changes.

On the domestic level, observers note that Syria now enjoys more internal stability due to security efforts. The bombings and anti-government attacks of the early 1980s have become almost non-existent due to tighter security. At the time, the government blamed the Muslim Brotherhood and communists for the bombings; thousands of members of both groups were arrested.

On the regional level, Iraq's Baath Party, seen for many years in Syria as a threat to Damascus, has also been severely weakened by the tight economic sanctions against Iraq. Baghdad can no longer afford to finance opponents of the Syrian regime.

Despite strong differences with Baath ideology, radical Islamist groups, such as Hamas and Jihad in Palestine and the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, maintain strong ties with Al-Assad, seen in the region as the champion of resistance against Israeli occupation of Arab territory.

Several meetings took place recently in Damascus between Baath officials and representatives of Islamist groups. The two sides said they were united by the struggle against Israel and agreed to form what could be an alliance between Islamists and Arab nationalists. Baath officials, known for their secular ideology, now state that "Arab nationalism is the core of Islamic action."

On the international level, Syria is looking to improve ties with the outside world, particularly Europe and the United States. Some observers interpreted the release of the prisoners in Syria as a goodwill gesture from Al-Assad before visiting France later this year, his first visit there since coming to power. Syria has been consistently criticised in Europe over its human rights record; the release of the prisoners might be an attempt to improve that record.

Syrian observers also note that many of those released are too old to take part in opposition activities any longer. For example, Al-Turk, the Communist Party leader, is over 70. After spending 18 years behind bars, the only wish he has, according to family sources, is to spend the rest of his days in peace. Al-Turk was jailed after refusing to condemn violent acts committed by Muslim Brotherhood members in 1980 and 1981. His call for allying with the Brotherhood also turned other fellow communists against him. Only a few Syrians can still remember Al-Turk while his Communist Party is today considered an ally, rather than an opponent, of the regime.

As for the release of a few Muslim Brotherhood members, government sources said that it took place "after they admitted the mistakes they did in the past."

The deterioration of the Middle East peace process and the stand taken by Al-Assad to counter the "Israeli threat" have also increased the government's support, depriving Islamist groups of public sympathy. As opposed to other Islamist groups in the Arab world, the Syrian Muslim Bortherhood cannot use the struggle against Israel as a winning card in mustering sympathy for its opposition to Al-Assad's government.

A Baath official told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the release of the prisoners aimed at "mobilising the Syrian people in support of their government in order to face the Israeli challenge."

Edited by **Khaled Dawoud**

Battling Africa's colonial legacy

Something stirring in Ouagadougou? There are dim lights at the end of the tunnel, writes **Gamal Nkrumah**



General Abdul-Salam Abubakar, Nigeria's new president, after his swearing-in ceremony in the Nigerian capital Abuja. The sudden death of Nigerian military ruler General Sani Abacha and the breakout of hostilities between Eritrea and Ethiopia were two issues that overshadowed deliberations at the OAUsummit in the Burkinabe capital Ouagadougou *(photo: AFP)*





Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic



French President Jacques Chirac

The impoverished, but diplomatically dynamic West African nation of Burkina Faso hosted the 34th Organisation of African Unity (OAU) summit meeting that began last Monday. But a host of problems in many different parts of Africa boded ill for the success of the conference.

The Burkinabe, whose capital Ouagadougou has hosted several key events in the last couple of years, are putting on a brave face. The OAU summit comes on the heels of the successful Africa Cup of Nations that was held in Ouagadougou in February 1998. Will the city which also hosted the December 1996 Franco-African summit, and the Pan-African Cultural and Film Festival (FESPAC) in February 1997 register another success?

Burkinabe President Blaise Compaore has taken great pains with the summit preparations, visiting the OAU headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and many other African capitals. "The OAU is of age to take into account and face up to the challenges confronting our marginalised Africa," said Burkina Faso's Foreign Minister Ablasse Ouedraogo.

The OAU was founded in order to foster continental unity, peace and political stability, but its detractors have dismissed it as a useless talking shop. "There will be no speeches, but heads of state will debate specific questions, talk among themselves and define their priorities," Ouedraogo added.

OAU Secretary-General Salim Ahmed Salim said upon his arrival in Ouagadongou earlier in the week that he expected this year's meeting to be "an important summit".

But the struggle to lend the OAU credibility and respectability is an uphill one. Presidents are still failing to show up at the summit meetings because of political intrigue and attempted coups at home. Guinea Bissau's President Joao Bernado Vieira did not turn up for the summit because renegade troops tried to capture the country's army headquarters. But, it was the Eritrean-Ethiopian border dispute that erupted into full-scale war last week that overshadowed the Ouagadongou conference.

Almost 40 decades after African countries gained independence from European colonial powers, African leaders are still grappling with political problems, like border disputes and tribalism, produced by the massive destruction and disruption of the continent's social fabric and political structures of precolonial times that followed the European balkanisation and colonisation of Africa.

One of the most pressing problems facing the OAU today is the proliferation of disputes relating to desperate attempts to reaffirm the national sovereignty of African countries. A majority of the continent's 54 countries are small and colonially-created political entities.

From South Africa's economic domination of southern Africa, Nigeria's military intervention in smaller neighbouring states like Sierra Leone and Liberia, to Ethiopia's increasingly assertive role in the Horn of Africa, it has become evident that the larger African political entities are attempting to take full charge of the continent's destiny.

Conflicts in Africa are becoming increasingly regional and are no longer strictly national. Although not officially on the OAU summit agenda, the emotionally-charged issue of the suspension of founder OAU member Morocco in 1985 because of the admission of the former Spanish colony of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) is a case in point. During the Ouagadougou summit African countries that support Morocco's return to the OAU fold, including the summit hosts Burkina Faso, put pressure on Algerian President Lamine Zeroual, who was in Ouagadougou for the OAU summit, to have the SADR suspended to clear the way for Morocco to "take its rightful place in the OAU." Algeria, traditionally the strongest backer of the SADR, is under fire from most African nations, including former SADR supporters, who want to see Morocco as a full OAU member.

The 1963 decision by the founding fathers of the OAU to accept the boundaries which African states had inherited from the colonial authorities buttressed the role of the OAU as a defender of the colonially-defined status quo, and left little room for creative alternatives to resolve the continent's many festering conflicts over national boundaries.

The boundaries of contemporary African states were arbitrarily drawn by European colonial powers at the Berlin Conference of 1885. The African continent was carved up into territorial units and various, and very often disparate ethnic groups with their own tribal traditions and languages, were lumped together into one colonial territory. The colonial authorities deliberately fostered divisions between these groups.

A policy of cultural separatism was adopted by the colonial power. A case in point is Sudan, where the country was divided into north and south and where differences in culture, language and religion between north and south were accentuated. Before British colonialism a process of gradual Arabisation had taken place throughout the vast territory now incorporated into Sudan and beyond its present boundaries in what was then the Islamist Mahdist state.

Even where there was a homogenous culture as in Somalia, the colonial authorities conspired to carve up separate colonies to exacerbate tribal divisions. The Somali people who formed one ethnic group, speaking one language, Somali, and sharing one religion, Islam, were divided by colonial boundaries and subjected to five different colonial authorities: French, British — in Somaliland and in Kenya — Italian, and Ethiopian.

The post-colonial African states inherited the colonial boundaries that did not respect the traditional ethnic, linguistic or religious divisions that existed in pre-colonial times, and imposed artificial "nation-states" on rival ethnic groups which did not share a fundamentally distinct or internally homogenous culture. The result was that the newly independent African nation-states suffered from constant ethnic conflict.

Taking account of ethnicity may, in its looser sense and more moderate forms, play a part in facilitating the democratisation process in Africa. But in its stronger versions, stressing the ethnic factor in African politics creates a far more divisive, dogmatic and essentially irrational ideology. Tribalism, which has appeared in recent years to be ascendant in Africa and to have arrogated the worst aspects of ethnic politics to African leaders and academics who brandish about the ethnic factor, creates a climate of political instability and conflict. Sadly, this is the case throughout much of Africa. Tribalism has taken on more viscous forms in the post-Cold War period. It has become the animating dynamic behind much national, regional and pan-African politics in Africa today.

Political and religious leaders and their intellectual cronies thrive on creating some kind of animus against certain ethnic, linguistic and religious groups. We have seen this in Rwanda and Burundi between Hutu and Tutsi. This kind of animus sometimes transcends national boundaries and envelops entire regions. There is now a fear throughout Central Africa of Tutsi hegemony. The sad irony is that tribalism saps much political energy and precious national resources. It dictates national policies and tops the agendas of regional and continental conferences and summits meetings.

Tribalism in Africa has traditionally been closely associated with the suppression of political pluralism and the centralisation of economic and political power.

The outbreak of secessionist wars is also associated with marginalised groups resisting control by a relatively privileged ethnic group. The problem is that only the economic and political elites of the supposedly privileged ethnic group enjoy the privileges associated with power and wealth, while a vast majority often remains in abject poverty.

Tribalism is not so much about mythical visions of a glorious past of people of a certain tribe or ethnic group. Rather, contemporary tribalism in Africa is more about squabbling over acquiring ever larger shares of the "national cake." Invariably one tribe, ethnic or religious group is accused of acquiring, usually by foul means, disproportionately large shares of the "national cake". The process of appropriating the supposedly disproportionate share of national resource allocation is inextricably intertwined with the tribe's supposed control of political, and increasingly military, power.

The truth is that very often a few closely connected and politically influential individuals many of whom come from the same region monopolise the gains accrued from playing the tribal card in African politics.

Moreover, the laws and institutions inherited from the colonial powers were often designed to exploit ethnic, religious and linguistic differences within and between African states.

For instance, Eritrea and Ethiopia share a great deal culturally, but the long Italian colonisation of Eritrea was designed to mould a new sense of nationhood among the nine different ethnic groups of Eritrea, many of whom have deep roots and close relations in Ethiopia.

The challenge of forging national identities out of disparate ethnic and linguistic groups remains the most pressing political and cultural problem in contemporary Africa.

The political and social struggles tribalism generates invariably have an economic basis. But, as the OAU founding fathers pointed out 35 years ago, the continent is far too fragmented politically to be economically viable. Economic integration under the OAU's 1991 Abuja Treaty to set up an African Economic Community appears to be the only way that the small African economies can collaborate in an age of giant regional and continental groupings. Economic integration was high on the 34th OAU summit meeting, but without peace and political stability the road to economic development will remain arduous.

Fall-out in the Great Lakes

One year after Laurent Kabila took power in Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of Congo, there are growing signs of a rift between his government and key allies who helped him overthrow Mobutu Sese Seko, reports **Peter Mwesige**

An emerging rift between Laurent Kabila's government and Uganda and Rwanda, key allies that backed his campaign to power a year ago, was confirmed when a government minister in the Democratic Republic of Congo publicly criticised Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni on 22 May.

Pierre Victor Mpoyo, minister of state for economy and oil, accused Museveni at a press briefing in the Congolese capital Kinshasa of interfering in the internal affairs of the former Zaire by making disparaging comments about Kabila. "Our head of state is respected both outside the country and by the population," he said. "We don't see why his Ugandan counterpart is so busy telling people that President Kabila controls nothing inside or outside the country."

The Congolese minister did not mention what the Ugandan president had said to provoke Kinshasa's ire. Observers believe Museveni's alleged remarks could have been made behind the closed doors of the diplomatic world. "We warn President Museveni that he should concern himself with the affairs of Uganda," Mpoyo added. "We no longer want [him] denigrating our head of state who is respected."

Mpoyo also said that Kampala was "slandering" Kabila because the interests of Ugandan smugglers and traffickers had been adversely affected. He accused unnamed top Ugandan government officials of smuggling timber, gold, and diamonds from the Congo.

"There are some people who arrogate themselves mining concessions in [the country] without informing us," he said. But, Ugandan officials have since tried to downplay the rift. Minister of State for International Relations Martin Aliker said on 1 June that the two governments remained partners with "only a slight misunderstanding to clear up."

Amama Mbabazi, minister of state in the president's office, added that the Ugandan government was using diplomatic channels to find out President Kabila's position on the remarks made by Mpoyo. "Of course in any country, if a minister makes a statement, it is assumed that he is speaking on behalf of government," Mbabazi said. "But as of now, the relationship between Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo is not worrying and if there are problems, they will be sorted out."

There were unconfirmed reports last week that President Museveni had sent his special envoy, Tarsis Kabwegyere, to Kinshasa with a conciliatory message to Kabila.

The first public sign of a rift between Kabila and his two key allies was when both Uganda and Rwanda stayed away from a 16-17 May regional security and development summit he had called as part of celebrations marking his first year in power.

Kabila's Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo came to power on 17 May 1997 after an eight-month military campaign backed by neighbouring Angola, Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda. The Congolese president took the embarrassing step of cancelling the summit, citing border disputes between another key ally, Eritrea, and Ethiopia. He said both Eritrea and Ethiopia had been deeply involved in the preparations and organisation of the summit. But Kinshasa also accused the West of persuading Uganda and Rwanda to distance themselves from Kabila's government.

The international community, and especially the United States, has come down hard on Kabila over human rights violations and the slow pace of political and economic reforms. Kabila had invited 16 heads of state to the failed summit. Others to attend were the leaders of Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Congo Republic, Gabon, Kenya, Mozambique, Tanzania, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Uganda and Rwanda were reportedly opposed to the summit being attended by countries harbouring rebels fighting against their governments. The Congo Republic, the Central African Republic and Gabon are said to have Hutu soldiers who are fighting the Tutsi-led Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) government in Kigali.

Rwanda contributed forces to Kabila's rebellion and had maintained a strong hold on the new government since Mobutu's fall. But Kabila is reported to have been trying to cut Rwanda's hold and has instead moved closer to Tanzania, which currently has tense ties with Rwanda. The Kigali government accuses Tanzania of hosting anti-RPF rebels. Interestingly, at the time the Kinshasa summit was supposed to take place, Museveni was in Rwanda meeting with Rwandan Vice-President and Minister of Defence Maj. Gen. Paul Kagame and Eritrean leader Issaias Aferweki.

Uganda and Rwanda's fall-out with Kabila's government is partly blamed on his army's failure to control the east of the country which rebels have used as a base for launching attacks into Uganda and Rwanda. Hutu extremists fighting the Kigali government and Ugandan rebels calling themselves the Allied Democratic Forces continue to mount attacks from eastern Congo. Kabila reportedly wants a diplomatic solution to the problem of insurgency while Uganda and Rwanda reportedly take a harder line on the problem.

However, observers also point at the emerging rift as a reflection of a subtle power struggle in the Great Lakes region. Ugandan President Museveni, who hosted a regional summit as part of US President Bill Clinton's African tour, has increasingly been depicted both in the region and internationally as the Great Lakes' new strongman. But it appears that Kabila, who is described as obstinate by Western diplomats, does not want to be anybody's stooge.

The Washington Post on 19 May carried an article in which an unnamed senior Congolese official attacked Uganda for treating Congo like a client state. "It's nonsense to believe that this country could be a client of Rwanda or Uganda," the official was quoted as saying. "This country is bigger, has more resources, has nine borders. It can't be a client of small countries like that." The Democratic Republic of Congo is Africa's third largest country with a population of 45 million. However, it remains an economic wreck and there is mounting internal criticism that Kabila just took off from where his predecessor Mobutu, who pillaged the country for 32 years, left.

Congolese Minister Mpoyo also hinted at a power struggle at the 22 May press briefing in Kinshasa. "Why all this jealousy about somebody (Kabila) who is magnanimous and who has never demanded the leadership of the region?" he asked. "On the contrary, [President] Kabila believes that all heads of state in the region are equal." He added: "We do not have any leader in the region, but each country has its leadership."

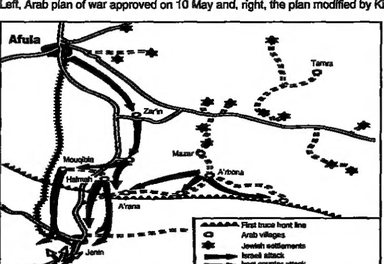
Charles Onyango-Obbo, editor of Uganda's leading independent private newspaper, *The Monitor*, said in a 20 May article that the troubles in the Great Lakes region are in large measure due to both an absence of democracy or its failure. "It's ridiculous to see the Museveni and Kagame governments taking a holier-than-thou position toward Kabila," Onyango-Obbo added. "They don't have any superior moral example to set for Kabila." Whatever the case, a rift of such proportions spells more disaster for a region that is yet to recover from political instability.

Slinging out the David-Goliath myth

A few resilient settlers heroically facing the massed forces of all the Arab countries that surrounded and threatened to swallow them. The official Israeli version of the 1948 War, carved, by now, on tablets of stone, could hardly be

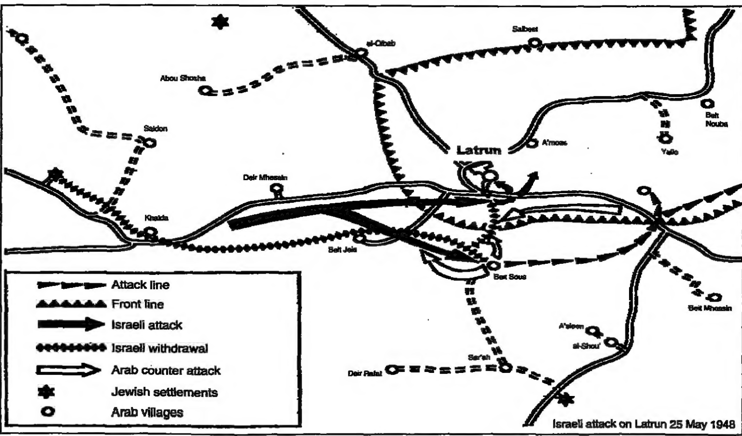
Maps taken from Walid Khalidi's study "Fifty years since the 1948 war", *published in the Arabic daily Al-Hayat*, 15-23 May 1998

Left, Arab plan of war approved on 10 May and, right, the plan modified by King Abdullah on 14 May



Israeli attack on Jenin and Iraqi counter attack 28 May-4 June 1948

The Syrian attack on Samakh, 18-23 May, 1948



Israeli attack on Latrun 25 May 1948

In the official Israeli narrative the first Arab-Israeli war (15 May 1948-20 July 1949) is presented as a battle between David and Goliath. It is an image consolidated by pre-war Arab propaganda. On 21 May 1948, Yigael Yadin, the Israeli army's chief of operations, wrote: "The regular forces of the neighbouring countries — with their equipment and their armaments — enjoy superiority at this time. However, evaluation of the possibilities cannot be merely a military consideration of arms against arms and units against units, since we do not have those arms or that armoured force. The problem is to what extent our men will be able to overcome enemy forces by virtue of their fighting spirit, planning and tactics."

Yet this version of a war between the combined armed forces of the Arab world and a well organised but small and ill-armed number of Jewish men (and women?) is a gross falsification, though one that prevailed worldwide for almost two decades. It was not until the June 1967 War that Israel revealed to the world the strength of its military machine.

The truth is that Israel, even before its official creation, has constituted the most militarised community in the region. It has never been less than armed to the teeth.

According to Hitham Al-Kilani in a study published in the London-based Arabic daily *Al-Hayat*, marking the 50 years that have passed since the 1948 war: "The American Intelligence Agency, in a report dated 27 July 1948, estimated the figures of the forces engaged in combat inside Palestine as follows — 27,000 Arabs (with the ability to draw upon another 19,800 stationed near), while the Jewish forces engaged in combat were estimated at 97,800."

In another study, however, also published in *Al-Hayat*, Prof Walid Khalidi estimates the number of Arab troops during the first stage of the war (15 May-11 June) as 18,000 maximum. Add to this the fact that Jewish forces were well-equipped and trained and under united leadership, while the Arab forces were ill-equipped, ill-trained and without any convincing leadership, and the David and Goliath version of the conflict, that gained such hegemony, is revealed for what it is, nothing but a myth. Indeed, at no point throughout the entire war did Israeli combat forces outnumber their Arab counterparts by less than two to one.

Neither should we forget that before the Arab armies entered Palestine on 15 May the Jewish forces had already taken over not only many Arab villages in the area allotted to the Arab state in the UN partition plan, but also a number of major towns, including Tibireus, Haifa, Jaffa, Acre and Safed. In the process they expelled more than 400,000 Palestinians.

STAGES OF WAR: The war can be divided, however roughly, into four stages, including cease-fire periods. (It is, after all, important to remember that most of the territorial gains made by the newly established state of Israel were acquired during periods of cease-fire):

Period one includes the first round of battles (15 May-10 June 1948); period two the first truce (11 June-8 July); period three the second round of battles (9-17 July); and period four, extending between the second indefinite truce imposed on 18 July 1948, until the signing of the four cease-fire agreements with Egypt (24 February 1949), Lebanon (23 March 1949), Jordan (3 April 1949) and Syria (20 July 1949).

In his study Khalidi says that the first meeting to take place between the commanders of the Arab armies before the war was held on 30 April in Amman. At that meeting the military commanders agreed that to ensure victory over the Jewish forces they must have under their command "no less than six completely organised divisions and six squadrons (72 aeroplanes) of bomber fighters."

The politicians assembled to listen to the opinions of the military at the meeting decided that their demands were more than they could afford. The Arab armies, they decreed, should enter Palestine with whatever could be made available, and that the force could be gradually increased during the course of the war.

So what were the forces available on the eve of the war? Prof. Khalidi details them as follows:

EGYPTIAN TROOPS, according to a secret report of the Egyptian army, comprised two forces: the main group lead by Major General Ahmed Ali Al-Mawawi, and a lighter, mobile force lead by Ahmed Abdel-Aziz. The first force comprised the 1st Infantry Battalion (numbering 700-750), the 6th Infantry Battalion (700-750), the 9th Infantry Battalion (700-750), an armoured reconnaissance battalion (35 armoured vehicles), a light tank battalion (seven tanks), three 25 pound cannon batteries (24 cannons), one 18 pound cannon battery (eight cannons) and one six pound anti-tank cannon battery (eight cannons).

The light mobile, essentially commando force, commanded by Ahmed Abdel-Aziz, comprised four officers and 124 soldiers armed with personal guns, eight Bren machine-guns, four light cannons (3.7 inch) and four two pound anti-tank cannons.

The Egyptian air force was divided across two fronts. The front-line force in Arish included six fighter bombers (Spitfires) and two reconnaissance planes. The second force, based in Cairo, comprised six Spitfires, five Dakota transport planes and one reconnaissance plane.

THE IRAQI TROOPS, according to the memoirs of General Saleh Sa'eb Jabouri, chief-commander of the Iraqi army, comprised a mechanised and infantry force. The first included three battalions and two engineering and intelligence units (106 officers, 1,837 soldiers, 47 tanks and 18 cannons). The second comprised 3 battalions and three small medical, engineering and intelligent units (97 officers, 2,257 soldiers). Iraqi troops, then, numbered 4,200.

The Iraqi air force comprised 12 Anson light transport planes, three gladiator transport planes and ten Fury fighters. However, in a secret report cited by Khalidi, it is stated that "the Fury fighters were unable to participate in the battles because of lack of ammunition... other Fury fighters purchased never reached us... 18 planes were held in India and all efforts to get them failed."

SYRIAN & LEBANESE TROOPS: The Syrian troops comprised one brigade of 1,876 officers and soldiers with personal arms, six tanks, 32 armoured vehicles and 12 75mm cannons. Estimates of the size of the Syrian air force range from between four to ten Harvard training aeroplanes.

The Lebanese troops were minuscule and adopted defensive tactics. In his memoirs, Jabouri mentions that the commander of the Lebanese army, Major General Fouad Shehab, informed the commanders of the Arab armies in their 30 April Amman meeting that Lebanon, owing to a lack of ammunition, would participate with only one battalion. During the war, though, two battalions were actively engaged in retaking Malkiya on the Lebanese borders on 4 June 1948. The Lebanese force comprised the 3rd Snipers Battalion (436 officers and soldiers), supported by an armoured battalion of four armoured cars and six tanks.

TRANSJORDAN'S ARAB LEGION was the best equipped and trained of the Arab forces. *According to the memoir's of Abdullah Al-Tal*, commander of the 6th Battalion of the Arab Legion in 1948, Transjordan's forces numbered 7,850. However, General Sir John Glubb (Glubb Pasha), commander-in-chief of the Arab Legion in 1948, gives a lower estimate in his memoirs, insisting that there were 6,000 men, though only 4,500 of them were ready for combat. Glubb adds that the Arab Legion, which depended on Britain for supplies of ammunition, had no reserves and was effectively paralysed following the UN embargo on arms sales. *According to Glubb* the army possessed ammunition "enough in theory for one battle only". Soon exhausted, Transjordan's forces had to wait for 16 months, until September 1949, before it could replenish supplies.

In conclusion, the Arab armies lacked the freedom of action and the organisational skills required to confront the Zionist aggressors. The top brass of the army of Transjordan consisted of British officers, while the movements of both the Egyptian and the Iraqi armies were restricted by the defence agreements they had signed with the British government. And both the Syrian and Lebanese armies, they were reeling from years of being under French mandate.

Some Arab countries, such as Iraq and Syria, did make attempts to acquire up-to-date arms but their endeavours failed and the war ended before they could achieve such a goal.

ARAB PLAN OF WAR: The Arab armies' plan was not finally approved until 10 May, when the political committee of the Arab League met in Damascus with the military commanders and approved their plans after lengthy deliberations. The *plan stipulated* that: the Lebanese *army* should proceed along the coast in the direction of the Israeli settlement Nahariya, and to Acre (occupied by the Haganah on 16 May); the Syrian army should proceed from Lebanese territory to Safed (occupied by the Haganah on the day of the meeting) and Nazareth; the Iraqi army should proceed across the River Jordan, south of the Sea of Galilee, and then advance in the direction of the Jewish town of Afula; part of the Arab Legion was to cross the River Jordan 15km south of the Iraqi army, and converge with the Iraqis at Afula, while the larger part of the Arab Legion headed north to Afula from Jenin. Meanwhile the Egyptian army was to proceed from Sinai along the coast to Tel Aviv.

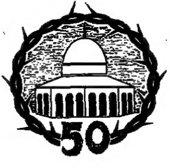
The plans, based upon massive underestimates of the size and strength of the Jewish forces as well as exaggerated assumptions about the capabilities of the Arab armies, assumed that the Egyptian forces would be able to threaten Tel Aviv and thus draw all the Jewish forces in that direction, leaving Afula vulnerable to Arab takeover. It was also assumed that there was no danger involved in exclusively focusing on Tel Aviv and Afula. Jerusalem, indeed the whole of middle Palestine, it was naively thought, were in no danger.

On 14 May, King Abdullah, general commander of all Arab armies, changed the plan. Now Syrian troops were to proceed from Lebanese territory and retake the Arab town of Samekh, south of the Sea of Galilee, and establish a bridge-head for crossing the River Jordan. Jor*danian forces* were *also* diverted from Afula, and were now expected to head towards Nablus, Ramallah and Khan Al-Ahmar, east Jerusalem. The remaining Arab forces were to keep to the original plan. These changes, as Khalidi points out, were responsible for the exaggerated belief among many Arabs that the Arab defeat was based solely on Abdullah's treason and last minute change of plan. "There is no doubt," Khalidi writes, "that these changes were politically motivated [the Jordanian-British secret agreement]... but it also had some military logic..."

ACTION IN THE BATTLEFIELD: On the Northern front, the Israeli and Lebanese armies took turns in invading Al-Malkiya village. Then the Lebanese and Syrian armies coordinated in recapturing it. On 18 May, the Syrian troops retook the Palestinian town of Samakh, south of Lake Tiberias, and captured the Jewish settlements of Shaar Hagolan and Masada, establishing a bridgehead across River Jordan.

On the central front, the Iraqi army, having reached Netanya, withdrew to Nablus. Jenin, which had been captured by the Israeli army, was liberated by the Iraqis. Meanwhile, Transjordan's Arab Legion reached Latrun on 18 May, attacked two settlements, and besieged Jerusalem. On May 19 the Haganah broke into the Old City of Jerusalem, but the Arab Legion came to the rescue of the Old City, and broke into the

further from the truth. Fifty years to the day that the first UN sponsored cease-fire, mediated by Count Bernadotte — a Swedish aristocrat subsequently assassinated by a Jewish gang — came into effect, Mona Anis **assesses the situation on the ground between the combatants after just 26 days of fighting. On paper, though, the Arab forces may well have appeared to have the upper hand. But they were overstretched. Their supplies of arms were exhausted, and they had no access to more. The Jewish forces, on the other hand, were determined and had the support to use the truce to reinforce their positions, to re-arm, recruit and train yet more soldiers for an arena in which they had never ceased to outnumber their Arab opponents by a ratio of two to one**



Years of dispossession

Jewish quarter. Although the Arab Legion failed to recapture any part of the areas of West Jerusalem, which had fallen into the hands of the Zionist gangs earlier, the saving of the Old City was the major achievement the Arab attained at that stage—and possibly through the whole war.

On the southern front, the Egyptian army, with some Saudi units, entered Palestine along two fronts. The first convoy proceeded along the coast, the second inland. The first convoy attacked Nirim and Kafar 'Daroum settlements, and then entered Gaza. Meanwhile, the Egyptian air force effected some air raids on Tel Aviv. Subsequently the Egyptian forces intensified their attack on the Deir Sneid settlement, finally capturing it on 24 May. They then proceeded north to assist the Arab Legion under heavy fire in Latrun and reached Asdod on 29 May, 17km north of Majdal, site of the Egyptian command.

The Egyptian forces occupying positions in and near Asdod comprised two battalions supported by anti-aircraft and anti-tank guns, two batteries of cannons and four light tanks. All in all the force numbered some 2,000 men. On 30 May, and for two consecutive days, Jewish forces waged a major counter-offensive against these troops but failed to retake the position. On 7 June the Egyptians took over the Jewish settlement, Nitsanim, which occupied a strategic location on the road from Majdal to Asdod. On 8 June Jewish forces launched a counter offensive to retake the settlement and failed. On 10 June the Israelis occupied a hill overlooking the settlement. The following day Egyptian forces succeeded to capture the hill, just as the first truce was imposed on 11 June.

Meanwhile, on 2-3 June, Egyptian forces took the fateful decision to proceed eastward from Majdal via Iraq Sweidan and Faluja to Bet Jebrin and Hebron. In doing so they extended the battle lines horizontally, isolating 25 Jewish settlements from the main body of the Jewish state designated in the UN partition plan as they extended the line to cut separate the Negev desert (which comprised one third of the Jewish state allotted in the UN plan) from Northern Palestine.

THE FIRST TRUCE: Fighting stopped for four weeks (11 June-8 July) in compliance with Security Council resolutions. After 26 days of fighting, the Arab forces remained in control of the greater part of Palestine. The Arab League Arab Liberation Army was stationed south of Nazareth. The Syrian army controlled an area extending from Hebron to the southern shores of the Sea of Galilee, except for a few settlements in eastern Galilee. The Iraqi army controlled central Palestine and were stretched along a front extending west to Tolkarem and Qalqilya, 12km from the coast. The Jordanian army was in control of the southern portion of the Jordan Valley, the area around Jerusalem, the Old City, Ramallah, Lod and Ramla. The southern part of Negev and the Gulf of Aqaba were under the control of the Egyptian army.

However, and as Khalidi notes, "what matters in war is not the occupation of large tracts of land — Germany swept the Soviet Union during the Second World War without being able to defeat it — but the ability to break the military capabilities and the will to fight of the enemy." By the end of the first round of the war the Arab forces were far from achieving this.

It is important to remember that Israel, at this stage, far from standing alone, had the support of both the US, the Soviet Union and the UN. As Khalidi rightly notes, these three forces "were Israel's midwife", the friends on whom Israel relied for arms and men.

The Arab armies, on the other hand, were stretched as far as possible. And increasingly they were subject to pressures, political and military.

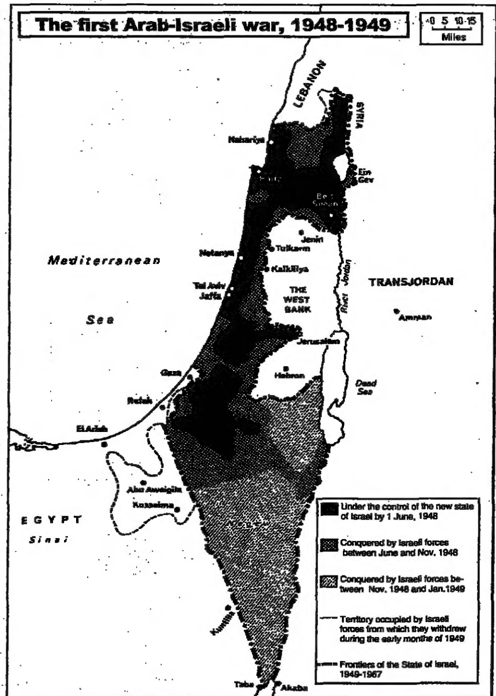
The UN Security Council appointed a UN envoy, Count Folk Bernadott, to negotiate the terms of cease-fire, and imposed an embargo on the sale of arms. The Jewish forces used the period of the cease-fire to re-organise themselves, strengthening their numbers and resources. Israel managed to recruit pilots from all over the world and to purchase 40 bombers from Czechoslovakia and three from the US. The Arab countries adhered to the UN imposed truce, lacking the power or backing to enable them to violate anything. Attempts to purchase arms proved unsuccessful. The US insisted on implementing the UN arms embargo when it came to the Arabs, and even those arms purchased from Britain prior to the war never arrived, despite the joint military agreements binding the Arab countries to Britain.

Sources: Hitham Al-Kilani, "Fifty years since 1948", *Al-Hayat*, 21-25 March 1998; Walid Khalidi, "Fifty years since 1948", *Al-Hayat*, 15-23 May 1998; Mohamed Heikal, *Secret Channels*, 1996; Harold Wilson, *The Chariot of Israel*, 1981; Selected editions of *Al-Ahram* and *Akhbar El-Yom* from 1 May-30 June 1948.


Israeli tank captured by the Arab forces in Jerusalem

Chronology

15 May: President Truman recognises State of Israel. First Egyptian troops cross border into Palestine and attack colonies of Kfar Darom and Nirim in Negev. Three Transjordanian Arab Legion brigades cross Jordan River into Palestine. Lebanese troops retake Lebanese villages of Malkiya and Qadas (on Lebanese border), attacked and captured earlier by Haganah.
17 May: Haganah captures Acre.
18 May: Syrian troops retake Palestinian town of Samakh, south of Lake Tiberias, and capture Zionist colonies of Shaar Hagolan and Masada. Arab Legion units reach Latrun and consolidate blockade of coastal road to Jewish quarters in Jerusalem.
19 May: Haganah breaks into Old City of Jerusalem. Arab Legion comes to the rescue of Old City.
20 May: UN Security Council appoints Count Folke Bernadotte as its mediator in Palestine.
22 May: Security Council resolution calls for cease-fire.
11 June - 8 July: First truce.
28-29 June: Count Bernadotte suggests economic, military and political union of Transjordan and Palestine containing Arab and Jewish states: Negev and central Palestine to go to Arabs, Western Galilee to Jews, Jerusalem to be part of Arab state with administrative autonomy to Jews, Haifa and Jaffa to be free ports and Lydda free airport. Rejected by both sides.




The saving of the Old City in Jerusalem was the major achievement the Arabs attained during the war

Major General Ahmed Abdullah Al-Mawawi
General Commander of the Egyptian Army in Palestine
Born 1897. Graduated from the Military Academy in 1916. Was appointed at the rank of Major as head of the training department of Military Operations. Promoted to the rank of Brigadier in 1945, and became the commander of the 4th Infantry Brigade. Was appointed in 1947 Commander of the Infantry Division. With the intensification of clashes in Palestine moved his headquarters to Arish where he was stationed along with an infantry force. Promoted, by Royal decree, to the rank of Major General on 14 May, and appointed commander of the southern sector of Palestine, the theatre of the Egyptian army operations. Married with four children.



Lieutenant Colonel Ahmed Abdel-Aziz
Commander of the Egyptian Commando force in Palestine
Born 1907. Graduated from the Military Academy in 1928. Joined the Cavalry division in the same year. Joined the Staff College in 1942, and was appointed, upon graduation, to the Military Operations sector. Was appointed commander of the 1st Cavalry Brigade. Resigned from the army in March 1948 and went to Palestine to lead the volunteer force. Married with one son. Died in August 1948 in Palestine.



Count Folke Bernadotte; UN mediator in Palestine
Born 1895. Swedish diplomat, president of the Swedish Red Cross and nephew of King Gustav V of Sweden. Negotiated the truce which began on 11 June but soon broke down, leading to further heavy fighting in July. He was shot dead by 3 members of the Stern gang on 17 Sept., as he crossed from the Arab into the Jewish quarter of Jerusalem. Yitzhak Shamir, later prime minister of Israel, was reported to have been on of the three. Shamir's memoirs refer to the incident without denying the report. The irony was that Bernadotte had saved thousands of Jews from extermination during the Second World War and was sympathetic to Israel in his analysis of the Palestinian-Zionist conflict.

We welcome letters and contributions on all subjects raised on this page. Material may be edited for length and clarity; it should be addressed to M. Anis, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St., Cairo; Fax: +202 578 6089; E-mail: weekly@ahram.org.eg

Banks and insurance on the auction block

The People's Assembly this week laid the legal foundations for the privatisation of major public sector banks and insurance companies. Gamal Essam El-Din reports on the heated debates

Two landmark laws aimed at privatising major public sector banks and insurance companies have faced vociferous criticism from MPs, economists and financial experts over the past two weeks, but eventually gained the approval of the People's Assembly thanks to a majority ruling of the National Democratic Party (NDP).

The two laws were viewed by a number of opposition deputies as the brainchild of Economy Minister Youssef Boutros-Ghali, who, they claimed, was working under instructions from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Some MPs criticised the government for having submitted the two laws without giving the assembly sufficient time for discussion, while others asserted that the two laws will give Israel and the US an opportunity to control the national economy. The legislation gives private investors, whether Egyptian or foreign, unlimited access to ownership in the four main state banks — the National Bank of Egypt, the Bank of Alexandria, Banque du Caire and Banque Misr. It prevents investors from holding more than a 10 per cent stake without authorisation from the Central Bank, however.

Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri vehemently denied charges that the bank law is a result of foreign pressure. He indicated that the last agreement between Egypt and the IMF, signed in September 1996, took the form of a "letter of intent," and dealt with some of Egypt's monetary and fiscal policies, privatisation and trade liberalisation. "The IMF had a certain viewpoint on these policies but we took a stance and said that there is a limit to what we could accept. We will never bow to any kind of pressure and we have no commitments, except to the public," El-Ganzouri said.

He emphasised that the banking and investment laws, along with others, are aimed at raising economic growth rates to eight per cent and generating more employment opportunities. "There is a pressing need to push the national savings rate up from its present level of 17 per cent to 25 per cent in the future," El-Ganzouri said. To achieve this objective, he added, "we have to speak a new language to the international community, to entice it to come and invest in Egypt. We have to convey a new message to the outside world that Egypt no longer has fears about the private sector."

The prime minister stated that the government's 1996-97 liberalisation moves had succeeded in attracting a greater number of foreign investors to Egypt. "For example, 63 offers were submitted by multi-national corporations for a contract to establish a private electricity station in Sidi Krir," he noted.

El-Ganzouri explained that public shares in the four banks are estimated at a value of LE6.5 billion, compared to LE10 billion in joint-stock banks. As for the size of banking deposits in Egypt, they stand at LE207 billion, LE125 billion of which are in the four public banks, and LE78 billion in joint-stock banks. "This means that the government's control of this sector has dropped from 100 per cent 10 years ago to 60 per cent at present," he said. He explained that, before privatising the first bank, the government will increase its capital by around LE500 million and float shares on the stock exchange.

NDP deputies concentrated on the necessity of empowering the Central Bank of Egypt (CBE) with strict supervisory tools and more independence to ensure that privatised banks will never be controlled by a handful of business magnates. According to businessman Khaled Mahmoud, the central banking institutions of industrialised countries are fully independent financial bodies, authorised to supervise credit activities. "But in Egypt, the CBE is made up of employees who are appointed and promoted by the government. This is why they can never say no to the government. So the bank rarely acts as an independent financial watchdog. The CBE is a terribly weak bank, and it has to be radically restructured," Mahmoud said.

Badr Shaarawi, an NDP member, expressed reservations that the CBE has any real supervisory powers. "Suppose a foreign family decided to come to Egypt to buy shares in one of the four banks. Each of its members is allowed 10 per cent of total shares, which allows the family as a whole to control the majority. This could threaten national security, but I do not think that the CBE will ever be able to stop this from happening," said Shaarawi. In response, El-Ganzouri simply promised that the law regulating the CBE's performance will be reconsidered to increase the bank's autonomy in decision-making.

Sameh Ashour, a Nasserist MP, took Economy Minister Boutros-Ghali to task for undermining the Egyptian banking sector. He asked him to resign, "because it seems you have nothing to do in this country apart from selling public assets." Ashour challenged Boutros-Ghali to "leave your job to other economic experts who have other ways of achieving development in this country."

The leftist Tagammu leader, Khaled Mohieddin, and Yassin Serageddin, leader of the parliamentary bloc of the Wafd Party, took a rare unified stand, insisting that a ceiling of 49 per cent be imposed on foreign ownership in the four major commercial banks. They also agreed that the bank privatisation law and other legislation have been pushed through parliament at a surprising speed. Nine MPs, including left-wing, Nasserist and independent deputies, voted against the bank law, while the five Wafdists abstained from voting. The NDP majority, however, approved it.

The assembly also approved the privatisation of national insurance companies. The assembly, however, was able to modify one of the law's articles to ensure that no individual monopolies be formed. The law, therefore, now states that private investors cannot hold more than a 10 per cent stake in any insurance firm without prior approval from the Insurance Control Authority (ICA). Investors are also required to notify the authority within two weeks if they are able to acquire shares amounting to more than five per cent of a company.

The law was seen by most NDP members as a praiseworthy attempt to revitalise the sluggish insurance sector and raise the share of insurance premiums in gross national product from its present level of 0.05 per cent to a target of 12 per cent.

The law was opposed by six left-wing and three independent MPs.

Ganzouri, Shazli and Boutros-Ghali showing the effects of a bitter attack on bank privatisation

Banking concerns

Experts and bankers are divided over government plans to privatise state-owned banks. Niveen Wahish explores divergent views

The recent endorsement by the People's Assembly's Economic Affairs Committee of a law allowing private ownership of state-owned banks is not without opposition.

Privatisation of the banking sector is part of the Egyptian government's liberalisation plan. The government argues that privatising state-owned banks is to the benefit of the Egyptian economy.

Summing up the government viewpoint, Mahmoud Mohieddin, senior adviser to the minister of economy, said that privatisation will lead to better performance by the whole banking sector. "Despite the significant improvement in the management of public banks, we still feel that a perfectly regulated private sector can outperform the public sector."

He explained that privatisation will increase competition, which means that banks will attempt to raise their efficiency and, accordingly, this will lead to better performance as measured by profits, return on equity, return on income and return on assets.

Mohieddin said that the existent "oligopolistic structure" — where there are a few banks controlling the market, its assets and liquidity — "is not the competitive structure we are after."

Mohieddin said that since the government is striving to raise investments from the private sector to 70 per cent, "private sector contribution to the banking sector should not be less than that," but, he added "we cannot increase private sector participation without reducing public sector share."

Moreover, he pointed out that the existence of public sector entities impedes private sector participation. "When we reduce government share, the tendency of the government to protect will diminish," he said.

However, he was quick to add that this does not mean that there will be no supervision. According to Mohieddin, not only will the banks be closely monitored by the Central Bank of Egypt (CBE), but the history of each buyer will be studied thoroughly as well.

"Market discipline and prudential regulation will create the right product: offering better value for money, better service, more efficient mobilisation of savings and more efficient allocation of credit according to market requirements," said Mohieddin.

While the law is expected to be debated by the People's Assembly in June, no announcement has yet been made as to which bank will go first, or the form of privatisation to be adopted.

Ismail Hassan, CBE governor, had announced that as soon as the bill is passed by the People's Assembly, the government will proceed to valuate, select ways to sell and make the actual offer.

Mohieddin expects the announcement of the chosen bank to be made before the year's end.

A statement issued by Minister of Economy Youssef Boutros-Ghali makes it clear that "not all public sector banks will be sold at once, and that the process of selling a bank would require some time in order to complete the investigation with due diligence, to carry out the valuation process, the detailed legal set up and other required procedures." The statement also stresses that "the sale of shares would not be directed to foreign investors only, and that the government of Egypt would prefer to see a significant amount of the banks' equity held by Egyptians."

While the name of the first bank to go has not been announced yet, observers believe that it will be one of the two smaller banks, namely Banque du Caire and Bank of Alexandria, with the latter the most likely candidate. The remaining two banks are Banque Misr and the National Bank of Egypt. The four banks put together hold 60 per cent of the country's deposits and 68 per cent of loans.

Although privatisation of banks was recommended by the IMF as part of the structural adjustment programme, Mohieddin said that it was not an obligation. However, Egypt has moved ahead in this area because the government is convinced that this was in the economy's best interest. In fact, according to Mohieddin, the government has gone beyond IMF recommendations in many parts of the economy.

Others were not convinced by government arguments. Among those is Hassan Abbas Zaki, former minister of the economy. In Zaki's opinion, the government need not sell state-owned banks to improve their performance. He believes that the expertise needed to turn public sector banks around can be bought, and that poor performance should not be used as a pretext to allow foreigners to control the Egyptian economy. "We should think twice before selling any of our national banks," he argued.

Zaki is concerned that lifting the ceiling on foreign ownership of banks will allow large multinational financial firms to have a grip on state-owned banks, which represent the backbone of the Egyptian economy.

He recounted that among the main reasons banks were originally nationalised was to secure their active participation in building a national industry and in protecting the Egyptian market against economic upheavals. The banking sector in Egypt was foreign-owned during the early part of this century, Zaki said, operating solely on behalf of foreign interests, never assisting the government with its development plans.

He pointed out that banks have a vital role in helping the government implement its fiscal and monetary policy. The four state-owned banks work closely together with the government in setting financial and economic strategies. Moreover, according to Zaki, public sector banks help the government by funding major national projects — such as the development of the New Valley — and as a result, "their names attract other investors".

Zaki believes that this role will no longer be possible in the presence of unlimited foreign ownership of banks. He strongly stressed that should privatisation of banks take place, it should be limited to Egyptians. He also said that none of the buyers should own more than five per cent of the bank. And above all, he believes that since the government will be experimenting with privatisation of the smallest of the four banks, it should increase the bank's capital, rather than sell off its shares.

Zaki mentioned that studying other countries' experiences with privatisation of their public banks would be useful in guiding the government.

Although some experts may not agree with government strategy, the general point of view projected by bankers is that they welcome the move saying that it will boost the performance of the financial sector.

Essam El-Ahmady, chairman of Banque Misr, believes that it is high time to look at privatising public banks. He said that the privatisation process will pump more money into the banks which will boost investment and enhance the banking sector with new, modern expertise. "It will strengthen the banks in light of international changes." He believes that any harmful banking practices can be avoided by close regulation and supervision by the Central Bank of Egypt and the Capital Market Authority.

However, there are others in the industry who do not share his views. One banker who spoke on condition of anonymity, failed to see the wisdom behind privatisation. "Banks do not need to privatise to increase their funds. They can easily take cheap loans from international donor organisations. Besides, banks suffer excess liquidity and do not need the extra funding."

Moreover, he said that the public banks' performance has been low and inefficient because they operate according to a 40-year-old law which has been subject to only minor amendments over the years. Also, public banks are weighed down by their size and by the huge responsibility they have towards supporting the national economy.

Seven more to go

THE MANAGEMENT of the sale of seven public sector companies, set for privatisation by the Egyptian Public Enterprise Office, has been assigned to the Privatisation Project led by Arthur Andersen, an international accounting and consulting firm.

The transactions will be targeted mainly at anchor investors. Only two of the seven companies, Alexandria for Containers Handling and Suez Stevedoring, are listed for initial public offering (IPO). The remaining five companies are the National Paper Company, El-Nasr Glass and Crystal, Steelco, El-Nasr Particle Boards and El-Delta Sand Bricks.

Project officials expect the successful anchor investors to introduce needed expertise, management skills, technology, new market access, new products and to expand capital investments.

The Privatisation Project, which is funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), is supposed to prepare all procedures and documentation according to international standards, with maximum emphasis on transparency and disclosure to potential domestic and international investors. It is also charged with transferring know-how to the staff of government agencies and holding companies.

The Privatisation Project has previously assisted the Egyptian government in privatising major sections of the economy but did not deal with specific companies.

The seven companies whose sale will be managed by the project are part of the 54 companies listed for privatisation by the government during 1998. Among the remaining companies are the wine producer Janacklis, the Nile Hotel, San Stefano Hotel, Misr for Studios and Cinema Production, El-Sharquia for Rice Mills, and the National Company for Paper.

Market report

Signs of recovery

THE CAPITAL MARKET showed signs of recovery last week. A major factor driving the upsurge was the lengthy plunge which made stock prices more attractive. Investment funds returned to the market as buyers after their managers convened with the Head of the Capital Market Authority Abdel-Hamid Ibrahim at the beginning of the week.

According to Eissa Fathi, managing director of El-Mostaqbal Brokerage, the ministerial privatisation committee meeting was another market stimulant. Members of the committee decided to resort to underwriters when offering public companies for sale. Underwriters evaluate the offering and promote it, with a commitment to cover unsubscribed shares. The presence of underwriters assures investors that the offering has a fair value, and that the company's future performance is promising.

During the meeting, the committee set a minimum capital requirement for newly established underwriters of LE100 million. Fathi pointed out that there are already four underwriting companies in the Egyptian capital market, but because their capital is below the minimum requirement, their role has been so far limited. These companies also act as market makers for a period of time after subscription closing.

CIB's decision not to distribute bonus shares to its employees served as another market energiser. CIB also announced that it will adopt a new plan to diversify its earnings base to reduce the impact of the tax law amendments. The plan includes expanding CIB's network branches, introducing new activities, such as securities depository and bookkeeping, and establishing an affiliated brokerage firm. These amendments were discussed in a meeting between CIB officials and Minister of Economy Youssef Boutros-Ghali.

However, subscription results for the initial public offering of the state-owned contracting company, Mokhtar Ibrahim, shows that the LE132 million offering was covered. The offering comprises 20 per cent of the company's equity. Market sources say that while local demand was weak, the offering was covered by a buoyant Arab demand.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

In search of cleaner energy

The earth is getting warmer and Egypt is among the nations engaged in a heated search for clean sources of energy. Sherine Nasr attended a conference that addressed different options

The search for clean sources of energy is not new. The first attempt dates as far back as 1839, when Briton William Grove invented the technique of producing electricity using natural elements. "Of course, environmental safety was not on his mind when he invented his technique," said Emad El-Sharkawi, chairman of the Egyptian national committee of the World Energy Council (WEC).

The issue of clean energy gained new dimensions after it became clear that the use of fossil fuels, the most common type of energy, has a direct impact on global warming.

Last week, Egyptian and American experts gathered in Cairo to discuss the effect of greenhouse gas on global warming and on industry, and the potential to use more environmentally friendly types of energy.

"Egypt was among the first nations to join a US initiative to study the impact of climatic changes on vulnerable industries," said Ibrahim Abdel-Gelil, executive director of the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA).

It was only in 1995 that major industrial nations decided to adopt a protocol to reduce greenhouse gas emissions responsible for global warming. "No other protocol has been debated more than Kyoto signed last December," commented Ambassador Gihad Madi, a member of the Egyptian team in Kyoto, Japan. "Not a single article was agreed upon until the last day of the conference," he added.

The reason, as it appears, was that huge quantities of these gases were produced by industrial nations. "The amount is overwhelming to the extent that it was not at all mentioned during the conference," said Madi.

Although it was finally adopted, the protocol was legally imperfect, as it failed to address cases of non-compliance. "There is no article to determine what kind of penalty to impose on countries that fail to meet their obligations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions," said Madi. Yet, the Kyoto protocol is believed to be the first concrete pact addressing global warming.

For its part, Egypt established a "climatic change unit" to work closely with industries that affect climate. "To switch to lead-free fuel and natural gas, and to promote renewable energy sources such as solar and wind power, are the main mitigation techniques Egypt followed to reduce the greenhouse gas effect," said Abdel-Gelil.

According to Mohamed El-Rail, professor of environmental physics at Alexandria University, three main sectors will be affected by climatic change: agriculture, water and coastal resources. "The distribution map of different crops is expected to change in the coming decades. Yet, nothing has been done to enhance the awareness of farmers," said El-Raii.

An interesting, yet alarming study by Egyptian experts predicted what would become of the northern coast in case the sea level rose by half a metre. "Every single aspect of life will be affected including bare soil, wetlands, tourism, jobs and services. The loss is estimated in the billions," said El-Raii.

Fuel cell, a new technique for producing electricity and water through the chemical interaction of oxygen and hydrogen, was described by El-Sharkawi as the most efficient energy production technique for the coming millennium. "Compared to other techniques of producing electricity, fuel cell is cheaper, more compact and definitely more environmentally friendly," said El-Sharkawi.

The technique was developed and utilised through the Apollo programme, conducted by NASA. In Egypt, it has been applied to a small-scale project for sewing in the village of El-Basaysa.

"Electricity produced by fuel cell is enormous, and the technique can be applied to hospitals, schools, factories and even households," he said.

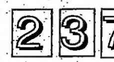
The replacement of car engines is perhaps the most advanced application of this technique. Mercedes, for example, has already manufactured 100,000 cars using fuel cell instead of gasoline. Ford has followed suit.

El-Sharkawi referred to an American study conducted in 1997 revealing that fuel cell electricity production will rise to 250 gega watts in the coming decade if the price of producing one kilo watt is $1,000. "This means that we are talking about $250 billion in investments on the international market in the next five years," he commented.

Three fuel cell buses have been given to Egypt as a grant by the Global Environmental Facility (GEF). "These will serve as models to examine the operational costs and maintenance problems in an Egyptian context," he said.

More important is the fact that the new technique will enhance the use of renewable energy in Egypt. "We are carrying out experiments to produce hydrogen using solar energy," said El-Sharkawi. Creating a market where fuel cell is in demand is another aim of the training course carried out by GEF in Egypt.

Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life



Although he was the secretary of the Council of Ministers, Ahmed Zaki felt a civic responsibility of no less importance than his post. He tried to instil in his countrymen the importance of education and knowledge through books. His vast private collection of books went public — made available first to the National Library, then, when more space was needed, in a new building built on land he owned and donated to the government. It was Al-Ahram's fervent wish that Zaki's love of books would permeate all walks of life in the country. From reports published by Al-Ahram, **Dr Yunan Labib Rizk** tells the story of the treasure Zaki bequeathed to his people



Illustration: Makram Henein

Al-Ahram's editorial of 12 August 1913 oozed sarcasm. Ahmed Zaki Pasha, the secretary of the Council of Ministers, had just put his extensive library in a trust for the benefit of the Egyptian public, and dedicated a large plot of land for a building to house that library. *Al-Ahram* believed that this generous endowment did not receive the acknowledgement it merited. It wrote: "And how did the people greet this important news? Did they simply skim over it as they do other news items, or were there those who asked themselves what is this endowment and what benefit will it bring? Did we see a group of people aware of the significance of this act? It is our concern that Egyptians received the news with less care and attention than it deserved. The public in the provinces was no doubt preoccupied, as usual, by the cough of its provincial director, the cold of the police commissioner and the marriage of the precinct chief of police. As for those we call the intelligentsia, they undoubtedly are engrossed in Karkub Effendi's article on the policy of the earth and heavens, Sheikh Zantoun's ode to camel mounts and litters, a debate between two writers on a subject of little consequence or those intellectual mudslinging matches of which the writers of our day and age are so fond of."

Al-Ahram readers would have been familiar with Zaki, who had already made numerous appearances on the newspaper's pages. In 1908 his name appeared frequently in connection with the newly formed Egyptian University. Zaki, one of the most active people to bring Egypt's first university into being, became the university's secretary and, in this capacity, continued to fight for academic excellence. On numerous occasions he appealed to political parties to lend more assistance to the new institution.

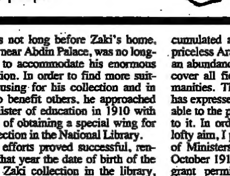
Zaki appeared again two years later in connection with the Royal Library and his efforts to "revive Arabic literature", as *Al-Ahram* put it. On this occasion, the newspaper published a letter by then Prime Minister Mohamed Said Pasha praising Zaki for "the more than 20 years he has dedicated to spreading knowledge and his unceasing efforts to implement the reforms necessary for the revival of Arabic sciences and literature." The prime minister then secured the approval of the Council of Ministers for the allocation of funds to publish several encyclopedic works, several of which were compiled by Zaki himself. Zaki was also nominated for the post of director of the Royal Library. His nomination was rejected by the German government, which had signed a protocol with the Egyptian government entitling the Germans to administer the library.

In response, the Egyptian government created the Supreme Council for the Royal Library and appointed Zaki as its chairman. "This is a major step forward in the advancement of scholarships and the spread of knowledge," commented *Al-Ahram*. "It is our hope that this development will serve to transform the library from a private administration to one which will benefit the public at large."

Prof Anwar El-Guindi, the author of *Ahmed Zaki: the Sheikh of Arabism, his life, opinions and effects*, wrote that most of Zaki's journalistic writings found their way to the pages of *Al-Ahram*. When Zaki travelled to London in 1892, the newspaper published chapters of his chronicles of that visit. "Since then, his contact with that venerable newspaper grew increasingly close and it continued to publish his articles until the final years of his life." It is little wonder, therefore, that *Al-Ahram* so ardently censured the lack of concern for Zaki's gift to the nation.

Of course, *Al-Ahram* was also guided by less personal motives. Scholars and researchers who frequent the National Library up to the present are only too aware of the enormous value of two of its major collections bequeathed to it: the Ahmed Taimour collection and the Ahmed Zaki collection. In an *Al-Ahram* edition of the summer of 1913, we learn something of the history of the latter acquisition. According to El-Guindi, the "Sheikh of Arabism" began accumulating his library in 1883, "in the prime of his youth". His sources were many: various book outlets in Cairo; gifts to him from his brother, a noted intellectual in his own right; school and academic prizes. His keenness for books also took him to a rather original route: he would scour the obituary columns of the newspapers in search of deceased owners of private libraries whose estates were being liquidated. As his collection testifies, this route proved an ample source of rare books and manuscripts.

Zaki earned the "Sheikh of Arabism" title from his vast collection which continues to serve as a primary resource for all disciplines of Arab and Islamic scholasticism. In building up his library, he followed in the footsteps of the great classicists of the European enlightenment, a movement which demonstrated that one of the best means to national resurgence is to cull from the depths of and revive the nation's literary and cultural heritage.



It was not long before Zaki's home, located near Abdin Palace, was no longer able to accommodate his enormous acquisition. In order to find more suitable housing for his collection and in order to benefit others, he approached the minister of education in 1910 with the aim of obtaining a special wing for his collection in the National Library.

Their efforts proved successful, rendering that year the date of birth of the Ahmed Zaki collection in the library, available to the public from 4.00pm to midnight.

In effect, Zaki's donation revived an old Arab Islamic custom. Over the course of Arab Islamic history in Egypt, the owners of significant private libraries felt it their religious duty to make their collections available to others in the service of the advancement of knowledge and science.

The next phase in the history of the Ahmed Zaki library was its transition from a private collection, albeit housed in a public building, to national public property. This transition was recorded in *Al-Ahram* on 11 August 1913 in the form of a letter from the minister of education to the prime minister. "As Your Excellency is aware," the letter said, "Ahmed Zaki, the secretary of the Council of Ministers, possesses an invaluable library in which he has accumulated a vast selection of rare and priceless Arabic literary works as well as an abundance of European works which cover all fields of science and the humanities. The owner of this collection has expressed his desire to make it available to the public and to facilitate access to it. In order to help him achieve this lofty aim, I put the matter to the Council of Ministers in the session held on 24 October 1910." The council approved to grant permission to Ahmed Zaki to house his works in an independent room in the National Library. It also charged the minister of education to take all measures necessary to augment the public benefit from this collection, particularly as it pertains to reviving Arab heritage.

"The Ministry of Education has done all in its power to provide the appropriate facilities in this room, furnishing it with lighting, water and a telephone. It is still open to the public daily and students and scholars continue to frequent it and to profit from it greatly.

"In the intervening years, Ahmed Zaki has spared no effort in expanding the scope of his collection, through the purchase of numerous publications and manuscripts, to the extent that the room is no longer able to accommodate his many successive acquisitions. The owner has, therefore, decided to add another philanthropic deed to his magnanimity. He has resolved to donate in trust a 1,500 square metre plot of his land located in Munira where there are numerous schools... it is his desire that this land serve as the location for his library and that the land and the buildings on it be dedicated in trust to students and all engaged in the acquisition of knowledge of every nation and creed... this trust shall be administered by the Ministry of Education during his life and following his death, administered as an autonomous foundation by the General Authority for the *Awqaf* (religions endowments)."

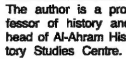
Al-Ahram was quick to praise the council's approval to "relocate the collection of the meticulous scholar Ahmed Zaki Pasha to the new location that is currently being constructed to house it on the land which he has donated for this purpose." The newspaper then launched a campaign of acclamation for Ahmed Zaki's munificence. Beneath the headline, "The Zaki Library: a cornerstone in the foundation", *Al-Ahram* outlined the lessons to be learned from this great philanthropist. It opened by asking, "What is it that lifts nations and leads them to advancement? What releases nations from their fetters and guides them to prosperity and the ranks of elevated nations?" The answer is forthcoming: "With books alone, and nothing but books, we can attain our goal and bring to fruition our aspirations. In books alone lies the answer to our progress or to our backwardness. Books alone hold the key to our advancement, our ability to catch up with and match those nations that preceded us." *Al-Ahram*, therefore, hoped that the Ahmed Zaki 'syndrome' would "spread to others because libraries are the font of education and refinement."

It continues, "In civilised countries, not a single village lacks a library for its inhabitants' amusement and to make better use of their spare time. Indeed, any one nation in Europe might well possess no less than 50,000 public libraries." The newspaper lamented the fact that this was not the case in Egypt "which only has two public libraries, one in Cairo and the other in Alexandria." Moreover, "for the longest time, the library in Cairo remained little more than a large warehouse for books until the industrious minister Hishmat Pasha restored it to the function for which it was originally intended. As for the Alexandria library, it was constructed more for Egypt to vaunt its existence rather than for it to serve Egyptians."

To address this shortcoming, *Al-Ahram* recommended that the government entrust specific agencies with the task of creating public libraries. While urban and provincial chiefs constructed public gardens, "it has never occurred to a single one of them to dedicate himself to the establishment of a library for the people." The newspaper then urged the creation of a public library in every provincial capital and in every urban district. One of the agencies it thought could undertake the task was the Higher Institute of Learning Club. "Is this institution, which counts a large body of erudite individuals among its members, incapable of instituting a fund-raising campaign, the proceeds of which would be allocated to the founding of public libraries?" it asked. "Can not the Coptic Patriarchy gather together the many old and valuable manuscripts it possesses, house them in a single edifice and make them available to the public?"

One of the more delightful comments of praise came from Dr Rashid Saada, a prominent Syrian intellectual living in Egypt and a close friend of Zaki. In a letter to *Al-Ahram* on 16 August he wrote: "Ahmed Zaki is short and stocky with a gleam in his eyes that exudes intelligence. His library is filled with rare books. I have seen for myself volumes of which there exist only one or two copies in the world. We spent some glorious moments together in this library which, to us, was a paradise of literature where we could simply roam from one delicious fruit to the next." To Saada, Zaki was the paragon of altruism. In dedicating his vast collection to the Egyptian nation, "his generosity outstripped that of Roosevelt. Roosevelt only bestowed to his country the surfeit of his riches whereas Ahmed Zaki gave the nation all the wealth he possessed."

Certainly the man who bequeathed such a precious gift merited a statue to commemorate him, at least in the opinion of one *Al-Ahram* reader. Yet, while the proposal never reached the light of day, the Ahmed Zaki collection remained intact over the years as testimony to the service he performed for his country. And today, scholars still consult these invaluable works in their present housing in the Egyptian Library on the Corniche.

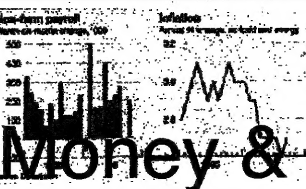



The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

Donation given to Ghada Afifi Hospital

THE EGYPTIAN National Insurance Company paid the second part of its donation (LE25,000) to Ghada Afifi Charity Hospital for Emergency Rescue. The donation given by the National Insurance Company came in appreciation of the efforts exerted to build the hospital which is the first of its kind in Egypt that offers emergency rescue for free. The National Insurance Company donated another LE25,000 as part of its contributions to complete the works on the hospital which will amount to one million Egyptian pounds before it is inaugurated.

Hazem Nur, board member of the National Egyptian Company, said the company was keen on fulfilling its role in society as an insurance company with social, economic, and investing activities.



Rotary Club seminar on insurance

THE SAQQARA Rotary Club held a seminar at the Gezira Club this past week on the topic "Insurance and its Role in Serving the National Economy". The keynote speech, given by Dr Abu El-Saoud El-Souda, head of Al-Chark Insurance Co., emphasised that the forthcoming period would require adaptation to recent changes taking place in the international arena, especially in regards to the insurance industry. He further noted that the development currently taking place, whether in the area of legislation or the mechanisms in the local market, were certain to raise the level of service in the sector.

It is worth mentioning that El-Souda recently returned from the 35th African Insurance Organisation's Conference, held in Uganda. El-Souda was the organisation's head from 1997-1998.

An unprecedented succcess for ACITEX '98



AS IT has for the past six years, Al-Ahram is expanding its efforts to organise the 7th Al-Ahram Computer and Information Technology Exhibition (ACITEX), to be held from 3-6 February 1999 at the Cairo International Conference Centre. Benefiting from previous experiences and in response to the wishes of the sponsors and exhibitors, next year's ACITEX will be divided between exhibits and sales pavilions, and likewise from among hardware and software, along with another important element, namely a special pavilion for the Internet, not to mention special pavilions for foreign exhibitors, who share the belief that ACITEX, with its mix of outstanding sponsors, exhibitors and visitors, is one of the most important exhibitions of its kind.

Likewise, the symposia conducted at the Artificial Intelligence Conference — held at the same time and place as ACITEX — has generated much interest, both locally and abroad.

All sponsors and exhibitors praised Al-Ahram Organisation's efforts for a successful exhibition and conference, which highlighted the Egyptian advances and contributions to the field.

Among the factors contributing to ACITEX's success the annual support is received from AMAC in tabulating visitor survey cards which are beneficial to sponsors and exhibiting companies in determining their marketing goals.

It is expected that the results of this survey will be made available to sponsors and participants of the 7th ACITEX.

For more information contact: tel. 3391071, fax 3941866.

Mohamed Youssef Habib

National Bank of Egypt:

History and leadership

DURING the last hundred years, Egypt's history has been characterised by numerous political and economic developments. Throughout that period, the National Bank of Egypt (NBE) has played a leading role in the economic arena and sustained its position as one of the main pillars of growth. NBE was founded by a decree from Khedive Abbas Helmi, issued on 25 June 1898, with a capital of £1 million to start operation from its head office in Cairo. Since its establishment, NBE was empowered with the authority to issue bank notes in addition to handling the government's banking activities and conducting the business of commercial banks.

NBE developed its operations and functions till the 1950s when it was empowered with the authorities of the Central Bank until its nationalisation in the early 1960s. Since then, it continued its operation as a commercial bank, besides providing the Central Bank's activities in areas where the latter had no branches.

That was followed by the merger of commercial banks to be confined to four banks on 1 July 1972. At that time, NBE specialised in banking activities relating to foreign trade, in addition to other banking transactions besides handling savings certificates.

Throughout its hundred years of operation, NBE played an outstanding role in stimulating economic and social development all along the different phases of the Egyptian economy. Consequently, NBE has sustained its pioneering position on the top of the Egyptian banking system and its prominent status on both the Arab and international levels.

The 100th anniversary of NBE was crowned with outstanding performance. The balance sheet recorded LE57bn, the highest among commercial state-owned banks. Deposits amounted to LE45bn against total investments of LE44bn. Such achievements were fueled by the sound distribution of its branch network comprising 343 domestic banking units. This, in addition to NBE's international presence via the National Bank of Egypt International, Ltd, London, and the Representative Office in Johannesburg, South Africa, as well as its 1,300 correspondents worldwide. NBE also has equity stakes in the Arab American Bank, New York, and the African Export and Import Bank.

These achievements have encouraged the Bank to break through the field of solicited rating. As a result, Standard & Poor's has assigned NBE the investment grade equal to the sovereign rating awarded to Egypt and the highest to be assigned to an Egyptian institution. On the other hand, NBE was the only bank to be assigned a D rating by Moody's in terms of financial strength, against the E rating given to other state-owned banks.

Furthermore, the classification of the far-famed specialised international periodicals placed NBE first among its peers, the third, in terms of total assets, amongst the Arab banks and the 312th amongst the top 1,000 international banks. This, in turn, reflects the outstanding development of NBE's activities during the last few years.

A weekly update on the NBE Securities Market Index from 28 May to 4 June 1998

National Bank of Egypt



The NBE Index has decreased by 7.74 points to register 303.64 points for the week ending 4/6/1998 against 311.38 points for the week ending 28/5/1998

4 largest increases and decreases:

Company	Change %
Extracted Oils Co.	+9.4
Alexandria National Iron & Steel	+4.9
PACHIN	+4.1
National Cement Co.	+3.8

Company	Change %
Credit International d'Egypt	-15.5
General Company for Storage and Silos	-14.1
Misr Al-Gadida for Housing and Development	-11.3
North Cairo Flour Mills	-8.3

Compu Camp Summer '98

COMPU Camps — Summer '98 — is the pioneer computer camp in Egypt. Compu Camp integrates outdoor activities with computer learning adventure. Campers will have the chance to learn and practice, under full-time supervision, the most commonly-used Microsoft applications (Windows 95, Word, Access, Excel) plus Internet and Web page design tools, all in a simplified programme made just for them, "Kids '98 Applications".

The camp experience will help children mature socially, emotionally, intellectually and physically. A positive environment and trained counselors will help them build self-esteem, self-reliance and a sense of community — tools that will enable children to become capable and contributing adults.

In addition to the computer skills, we offer sports, games, tournaments and lots of excitement with highly qualified and specialised instructors.

Our camp will be conducted from 15/6/1998 till 24/6/1998 in El-Gouna Village, in surroundings reminiscent of Upper Egyptian architecture. The camp is situated on the man-made island of Kafr El-Gouna right in the centre of the Red Sea resort of El-Gouna, 20km north of Hurghada. El-Gouna sports international hotels, villas and villages, surrounded by a labyrinth of lagoons. Telephone 4187103, 4181146/7/9.

Al-Ahram Weekly

War cannot solve anything

The sudden outbreak of war between Ethiopia and Eritrea is indeed a very unfortunate development for Africa. Beside the various historic and cultural links between the two neighbouring states, Ethiopian Prime *Minister Meles Zenawi and Eritrean President Isaias* Afeworki were brothers in arms in the fight against the former ruling dictatorship in Addis Ababa. It was also the sincere cooperation between the two which led to the peaceful creation of Eritrea in 1993.

Zenawi and Afeworki were seen as a new model for African leaders who are trying hard to bring their people both prosperity and democracy after the plagues of dictatorship, famine and the many other hardships that have afflicted the Third World in recent decades.

All these hopes, however, were shattered by the outbreak of war. At a time when most members of the world community are endeavouring to establish mechanisms for regional cooperation to improve the living standards of their peoples, the slightest dispute in Africa triggers a war. Peace and stability are key factors in any process of economic development, particularly in our continent. *As long as wars continue to break out,* we must inevitably continue to reiterate these principles.

African leaders, who concluded their 34th summit in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, yesterday, have reportedly agreed to send a delegation to both countries in an attempt to settle their dispute. The message will be: disagree, but do not fight. The air raids the belligerent countries exchanged last week proved that innocent civilians, not armed soldiers, suffer the most from any hostilities.

President Hosni Mubarak, in statements made on *Sunday, advised the two countries: "Fighting will not* solve the problems. Negotiations and negotiations alone can solve disputes. We have a long experience in this field."

Al-Ahram Weekly

Chairman of the Board........................ **Ibrahim Nafie**
Editor-in-Chief........................ **Hosny Guindy**
Managing Editor........................ **Hani Shukrallah**
Assistant Editor........................ **Wadie Kirolos**
Assistant Editor........................ **Mona Anis**
Layout Editor........................ **Samir Sobhi**
General Manager for Advertising......... **Hassan Hamdi**

Al-Ahram Offices

Main office
AL-AHRAM, Al-Galaa St. Cairo.
Telephones: 5786100/5786200/5786300/5786400/5786500. Direct: 5786064
Telex: 20185/93346 Fax:5786089 /5786833
E-mail: weekly@ahram.org.eg

Overseas offices

USA
Washington DC: Atef El-Ghamri, Al-Ahram Office, Suite 1258, 529 National Press Bldg, Washington DC 20045; Tel: (202)-737-2121/2122.
New York: Atef El-Ghamri, Al-Ahram Office, 39th Fl., Chrysler Bldg., 405 Lexington Ave, New York, NY 10174-0300; Tel: (212)972 6440; Telex: 497 9426 ITT U.I.; Fax: (212) 286 0285.
Los Angeles: Soraya Aboul Seoud, 600 S. Curson Ave., 402 LA, CA 90036, USA; Tel: (213)-857-0941; Fax: (213)-857-7084.

Russia
Moscow: Abdel-Malek Khalil, Ahram Office, Kutuzovski Pro Dom 7/4 Kv. 50, Moscow; Tel: 243 4014/ 243 1424; Fax: 230 2879

Canada
Montreal: Mustafa Samy Sadek, Al-Ahram Office, 800 Rene-Levesque Blvd, West Suite 2440, Montreal H3B 1X9, Quebec; Tel: (514)876 7825 Fax: (514) 876 9262/ (514)876 7825.

United Kingdom
London: Amr Abdel-Samie, Al-Ahram Office, 203 - 209 North Gower Street London NW1 2NJ
Tel: 0171 388 1155, Fax: 0171 388 3130

France
Paris: Sherif El-Shoubashy, Bureau Al-Ahram 26, Rue Marbeuf, 75008 Paris; Tel: (1) 537 72700; Al-Ahram F.; Fax: (1) 428-93963.

Germany
Frankfurt: Mohamed Eissa El-Sharkawi, Al-Ahram Bureau Friedrichstr. 15, 60323 Frankfurt, Tel: (069) 9714380/ (069) 9714381 Fax: (069) 729571.

Austria
Vienna: Mustafa Abdalla, 2331 Vosendorf Orts Str. 253; Tel: 692965/ 694805; Telex: 13 2726 GIGI A; Telefax: 694805.

Greece
Athens: Abdel-Azim Darwish, 69 Solonos St., Third floor, Kolonaki 106-79, Athens, Greece. Tel. and Fax :3634503.

Italy
Rome: Mustafa Abdallah [S.A.B. 2000] 00191 ROMA-V. Guido Banti, 34. Tel: 3332250 Fax: 3332294

Japan
Tokyo: Mohamed El-Dessouki, Duke Aoyama 4-11, Higashi 4 - Chome Shibuya - Ku, Room 402, Tokyo; Tel: (03) 340 63944; Fax: (03) 340 6625

South Africa
Johannesburg: Mohamed Sabreen, Oxford Manor, 196 Oxford road-Northland 2116, Johannesburg, Tel.and Fax: (011)4477425.

Brazil
Rio de Janeiro: Ahmed Shedid, Cx. Postal 2395, CEP. 20001.

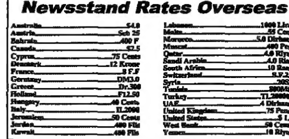
Annual Subscription Rates

Egypt........................ LE39.00
Arab Countries........................ $60.00
Other Countries........................ $150.00
Send your subscription order to:
Al-Ahram Subscriptions Department,
Al-Galaa St. Cairo, Egypt.
Subscription payments can be made directly in cash or by cheque to the same address.

Name........................

Mailing Address........................

Newsstand Rates Overseas



Australia	$4.0	Lebanon	1000 Liras
Austria	Sch 25	Malta	55 Cents
Bahrain	400 F	Morocco	5.0 Dirhams
Canada	$2.5	Muscat	400 Pesa
Cyprus	75 Cents	Qatar	4.0 Riyals
Denmark	12 Krone	Saudi Arabia	4.0 Rials
France	8 F.F	South Africa	10 Rand
Germany	DM3.0	Switzerland	S.F.2.0
Greece	Dr.300	Syria	30SL
Holland	Fl2.50	Tunisia	800Mils
Hungary	40 Cents	Turkey	TL200000
Italy	IL2000	UAE	4 Dirhams
Jerusalem	50 Cents	United Kingdom	75 Pence
Jordan	400 Fils	United States	$1.5
Kuwait	400 Fils	West Bank	50 Cents
		Yemen	10 Riyals

Al-Ahram Weekly

Advertising
Direct :(202) 3391071
Fax: (202) 5786023 -5786126
Telex: 92002-93345



Marketing
Direct: (202) 5786078
Fax: (202) 5786833-5786089 E-mail: weekly@ahram.org.eg

A principled programme

A move to permanent-status negotiations could well prove to the Palestinians' advantage, writes John Whitbeck

Israel and the US are urging the Palestinians to move now to permanent-status talks, without worrying about Israel's non-compliance with its "interim period" obligations. Perhaps reasoning, on the basis of experience, that anything both Israel and the US want them to do must be bad for them, the Palestinians are resisting.

Focusing now on the fundamental permanent-status issues, however, could serve both Palestinian national interests and the cause of peace if the Palestinians could set the agenda through a public appeal for peace. They could argue that they refuse to permit the failure of the greatest opportunity in 50 years to achieve peace with some justice. They could also recognise the fact that the enormous imbalance of power does not permit them to obtain their rights under international law or impose their preferences as to how a just and durable peace can best be built.

They should appeal to the Israelis to choose between the only principled alternatives. They *could pledge to work with Israel, not simply to* drag out a never-ending peace "process" but to actually achieve peace.

They could accept either a one-state or a two-state solution. In a one-state solution, the entire territory of the former Palestine Mandate would *be a single democratic state, free from any form* of discrimination based on race or religion and with equal rights for all who live there — a true democracy. In a two-state solution, Israel would continue to exist within its internationally recognised borders, and Palestine would continue to exist within that small portion of the former Palestine Mandate occupied by Israel in 1967, subject only to a mutually acceptable formula for sharing sovereignty in Jerusalem (the only part of the Palestine Mandate where sovereignty claims currently overlap) and to reciprocal boundary adjustments. The only third alternative is apartheid.

If Israel chooses a democratic, non-racial state, the Palestinians could cooperate to build it. If Israel prefers a two-state solution, then it must make two other choices.

Palestine could accept either to divide sovereignty in Jerusalem, the capital of Palestine as well as of Israel, in accordance with the clear position in international law that all expanded East Jerusalem is occupied territory, or to share sovereignty over an undivided Jerusalem, within the current municipal boundaries unilaterally fixed by Israel, as a "condominium" which would be the one and indivisible capital of two sovereign states. In either case, the entire city should afford free access to all Israelis and all Palestinians.

Palestine could accept that all Israeli settlers currently living in Palestine, as well as their descendants, should have a right of permanent residence *— on the clear understanding that they* would be legal residents of a foreign state, subject to the non-discriminatory laws of that state, with no special rights arising from race, religion or citizenship and with no foreign army of occupation on Palestinian soil. If, however, Israel's *vision of peace* requires the annexation of further Palestinian lands, Palestine could be willing to negotiate cessions of Palestinian land bordering Israel with the objective of transferring the least possible land including the largest possible number of settlers — on the clear understanding that any cessions of Palestinian land to Israel would be matched by cessions of Israeli land to Palestine and that all settlers living in settlements not transferred to Israeli sovereignty would then be promptly repatriated to Israel.

These are not easy choices for Israel, but they must be made if reconciliation — and peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians — are ever to be achieved.

The Palestinians could appeal to all Israelis to accept that the land both Israelis and Palestinians love can be shared, that both Israelis and Palestinians must win or both will continue to lose, and that there must be a common destination at which both peoples would be satisfied to arrive.

Such an appeal would serve the cause of peace in at least three significant ways. It is easy, indeed automatic, for Israelis to reject any Palestinian position without offering a viable alternative. It would be much more difficult to reject both of two alternatives, each of which would appear extremely reasonable (indeed generous) in the eyes of world (and even American) public opinion. A choice between a one-state and a two-state solution would make it blindingly clear that, by continuing to reject a Palestinian *state, Israel would be choosing* apartheid. It would increase the pressure on Israel to accept that a Palestinian state is both inevitable and desirable — and to do so soon.

It would be difficult to reach a Palestinian consensus on all these fundamental issues, and, if reached, such a position *would then, almost* certainly, be rejected by Israel simply because it is the Palestinian position. By publicly appealing to Israel to choose between different approaches to the fundamental peace issues, each of which would be potentially acceptable to Palestinians, a long, difficult and ultimately useless process of seeking a Palestinian consensus on these issues could be rendered unnecessary.

If a country's negotiating positions and objectives are completely contrary to international law and universal standards of justice, ethics and morality, that country must wish to keep them hidden from public view. If, however, a country's negotiating positions and objectives are fully consistent with international law and universal standards of *justice, ethics and morality,* that country should publicly proclaim them — loudly, clearly and often.

Even if, as is entirely possible, the Netanyahu regime were to dismiss such an appeal for peace with contempt, then it would at least be clear to the entire world that the "Oslo process" has nothing more to offer, that the Palestinians have sought peace through negotiations in complete good faith and that there is no reason to wait until May 1999 to affirm the existence of the state of Palestine (already proclaimed in November 1988 and recognised by over 100 other states at that time) in all the Palestinian territories conquered in 1967 (including those still occupied) and to apply for full member status for Palestine at the United Nations. Palestine would be doing so while holding both the moral and the legal high ground and in a context of unparalleled international sympathy and support.

If Palestine were a UN member state, the end of the occupation would no longer be a question of "whether" but simply of "when". If UN membership were applied for in such circumstances, US President Bill Clinton, with no more elections to worry about, an eye on his place in history, and fully aware that even his wife supports Palestinian statehood, might well *act in a wise and decent way — in the best in*terests of America, Israel, Palestine and peace.

The writer is an international lawyer who comments frequently on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Education and the Israeli challenge

In the second of the two articles he is contributing to the debate over Hussein Kamel Bahaaeddin's book on *The Future of Education in Egypt*, Mohamed Sid-Ahmed discusses Israel's key role in determining the features of educational reform throughout the Middle East in general and in Egypt in particular

Last week, I wrote that contemporary education aims not at transforming our brains into dictionaries, but at increasing our ability to master our environment and become imaginative thinkers able to gather, classify, analyse, synthesise and interpret the plethora of *data now available.* Only in this way can we develop our creative abilities and conquer new vistas.

Indeed, the issue of developing educational systems in line with the startling scientific and technological achievements of our time is not a luxury, but a fundamental need. Whoever does not move forward in the field of education is doomed to move backwards. This is all the more true in the Middle East, where Arab societies have to face the Israeli challenge.

The Zionist fathers claimed that Palestine was a land without a people for a people without a land. This statement is obviously absurd, for the land of Palestine has been inhabited by Arabs throughout recorded history, long before the modern wave of Jewish immigrants decided to make *it* their home. And, though it is true that much of Arab land is barren desert, it is equally true that this land has given rise to one of the great civilisations of the world.

Still, *it is worth considering whether this Zionist* claim has any validity in a metaphoric sense, specifically if applied to the fields of science and education. Could it be considered, for example, as meaning that because Arab societies were unable to keep up with the giant strides in modern science, technology, and, hence, education, they left the door open for an alien society to step in and fill the gap? In this connection, it is useful to highlight two characteristics that are specific to this alien body. First, Israel has managed to square the circle by being both part of the Middle East and totally separate from it, a feat that has helped sharpen disparities in societal standards and levels of development with its neighbours. Second, the persecution of the Jews in Europe, which culminated in the *Holocaust, has fine-tuned the survival instinct of* Israeli society, which is in a permanent state of mobilisation and high alert. In direct contrast, Arab societies have been lulled by the trickle-down effect of oil money into a false sense of complacency that has done much to demobilise them.

If Egypt wants to break out of this rut, it will have to face the fact that a socio-economic structure in which 'strategic services' enjoy such prominence can only promote a negative mind-set. Egypt was rewarded by the summit of the international community for making peace with Israel, and, later, for its unequivocal condemnation of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Thanks to peace, tourism has flourished in Egypt. Although the tourist industry has been the target of terrorist attacks in recent years, these setbacks have not diminished the resolve of the international community to keep Egypt's tourism a thriving industry.

But an economy based on services does not create the incentives for developing creative thinking. Only a society excelling in productive fields and operating under conditions of stiff competition can be genuinely innovative and motivated to establish the infrastructures that can help maximise its creative potential. That is not to say that Egypt should turn its back on services industries altogether, only that it should proceed in a manner that will not compromise its pressing need to overcome demobilisation and complacency.

The challenge represented by Israel in the fields of science and education is no less acute in times of peace than it is in times of war. *Newsweek* once wrote that only Israel constitutes a match for California's Silicon Valley, the most advanced centre of computer research in the world. A society capable of achieving such impressive results in computer technology is capable of coping with state-of-the-art technology in any field.

In its 50-year history, Israel's relations with Egypt have gone through different phases. In a first phase, they were limited to all-out hostilities. Then came a phase of partnership, when both states had a common interest in ensuring the success of the peace process launched at the Madrid Conference. Now relations are entering a third phase of rivalry over which country will occupy the leading position in the region. Israel proceeds from the assumption that its superiority over all Arab states combined, including Egypt, is a precondition for its long-term survival in the Middle East. This assumption, held by both Israel's *hawks and its doves, can only be detrimental to* Egypt. The latter is aware that 60 million Egyptians cannot live within the confines of the Nile Valley and that some form of Egyptian presence throughout the Arab world is unavoidable. Egypt is also aware that pan-Arab solidarity need not be expressed only in terms of the ideological form it assumed under Nasser. Pan-Arabism can also be based on forms of economic complementarity, of pan-Arab markets, over and above its traditional sources rooted in religion, culture and history.

A showdown with Israel is thus unavoidable, even in conditions of peace, particularly in the fields of science, technology and education. As mentioned in my previous article, knowledge depends not only on objective reality, but also on the subjective perceptions of the recipients of that knowledge. Accordingly, it is bound to differ according to the specific characteristics of each society. One field where competition between Egypt and Israel is likely to become acute is that of the growing shortage of potable water throughout the Middle East, a new source of friction that could eventually degenerate into 'water wars'. Shortage of water worldwide prompted French President Jacques Chirac to convene a world conference on water in Paris last March. During his last visit to France, President Mubarak delivered an address before the French Institute of International Relations in which he called for a concerted global effort to find a way of desalinating sea water at competitive prices. Mahmoud Abu Zeid, the head of the Egyptian delegation to the Paris Conference, offered Egypt as a site for an international institute to conduct research into issues raised by water shortage.

The research would not be confined to the field of water alone, but would extend to include such fields as solar energy in a region whose climate makes it ideal for the extensive exploitation of sunlight as an economic source of energy; genetic engineering to optimise the use of low-grade desalinated water for agricultural purposes in desert or semi-desert areas; geology and further development of petrochemical industries. Research into such fields could help transform Arab oil assets from a factor of demobilisation into one of invigoration and scientific creativity.

Israel is already active in all these fields. It will not tolerate Arab projects based on such advanced science unless they are undertaken in cooperation with Israel and under its supervision. Twenty years ago, Israel had no com*punctions about launching an air strike against* Iraq to prevent it from developing nuclear technology. It is only if Arab parties develop scientific knowledge of their own, commensurate with Israel's in these fields, that they can meet the challenge. This they can only do if their educational infrastructure meets the requirements of the age; in other words, the issue is one of proper educational approaches before being one of correct scientific programming.

Tolerant times

By Naguib Mahfouz

The issue of the persecution of Copts in Egypt continues to preoccupy members of the US Congress and the Jewish lobby. Well, I grew up in Egypt, as an Egyptian, and I never had reason to believe that Copts were being persecuted or suffering discrimination.

Before the 1952 Revolution, Copts occupied many key positions in the state apparatus. In those years, the bureaucracy was a good indicator of the state of society. The ruling party could appoint or remove top officials as it saw fit. When the Wafd came to power, my Coptic friends rejoiced, announcing: "This is the age of equality." Persecution at the time was political rather than religious, and affected Muslims and Christians alike. A Wafdist could be removed from his position when the Wafd was not in power, because of his political allegiance. Once the Wafd was back in power, he would also return.

At that time, there were 15 ministers in the Council of Ministers. Two were Copts, and the speaker of the lower house of parliament was also a Copt. I can almost say that any discrimination was in the Copts' favour.

If certain changes have occurred in this respect, they should not be attributed to a change in the heart of the Egyptian people. Terrorism has proliferated in the past few years, but it does not discriminate against Copts only. It also targets Muslims who refuse to conform to the terrorists' dictates and condemn their extremist positions.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

To The Editor

False friends, real foes

Sir- It is interesting to remember the subtleties and undercurrents of the 50 years of occupation of Palestinian lands, and view some similarities in the present stages of the process. In February 1947, Britain, under the Labour government of Clement Attlee, and under extreme pressure from the United States, decided to wash its hands of the Palestinian-Israeli "situation" *after 30-odd years of successful* clandestine cooperation, followed by a few (expected) years of betrayal and treachery.

The entire matter was turned over to the UN General Assembly, which appointed a Special Commission on Palestine (UNSCOP). The Commission recommended that, after British withdrawal, the country be partitioned into separate Jewish and Arab states joined by an economic union.

The Palestinians and all neighbouring Arab states rejected the proposal, and by January 1948, fighting started. On 15 May, the day after the establishment of Israel, the armies of *Egypt, Syria, Transjordan, Iraq and* Lebanon invaded Palestine from the north, east and south. Unfortunately, by mid 1949, there were 700,000 Palestinian refugees. The Israelis survived the wars of 1948, 1956, and of course the catastrophic events of 1967, all with a great deal of help from their "friends".

Now, in 1998, the US, the main broker (or shall we say breaker) of the *Middle East peace process is ready to* wash its hands of the entire mess, as the British did in 1948.

Israel made some preliminary calculations not long ago on the casualty figures should the Israelis declare outright dominance of all Israeli and Palestinian lands. The figures, I believe, were in the range of 120,000 Palestinians and approximately 30,000 Israelis. These figures assume no major *successful interference from any other* Arab states. Since there is no other Arab country prepared militarily to match US-provided state-of-the-art Israeli weaponry, substantial resistance is unlikely.

Then there is the question of the enormous US military presence in the Arab region (supposedly watching the dastardly, devilish Saddam Hussein). So, who in the Middle East is capable of stopping a full Israeli take-over of all Palestinian territory, should the US wash its hands of the matter, close its eyes (except for one eye on Saddam), and simply quit?

What can possibly provide deterrence *to Israeli nuclear and air combat ca*pabilities? If the US decides to ignore its responsibilities, and pass the matter over to the UN, perhaps it is time for them to leave the region militarily as well. Of course, the Kuwaitis are very skittish about it, so maybe some Americans should stay there. But I have been wondering for some time now why they keep hanging around in Saudi Arabia. Are they studying Islam?

In any case, *if the Americans con*veniently pull out of the peace process and yet maintain their overwhelming military presence in the region, then I'd say we've all been fairly well duped during the past several years. If this is so, perhaps it is time to discuss "deterrence strategies" with "brother" Saddam.

A. Ibrahim
Nasr City
Cairo

Southern inspiration

Sir- Until the Jews learn to acknowledge their wrongdoings in the past and engage in a process of reconciliation with the Palestinians, very much like the boers in South Africa, there can never be, nor will there ever be, peace in the Middle East!

Former South African president F W De Klerk recognised this in 1989 and nine years later we are on the path towards an South African rennaissance and are well placed to enter the next millenium with hope and optimism.

The arrogance of the Zionists, epitomised by the Oslo Peace Accords, is *the one stumbling block* towards true peace and prosperity. Just as the Irish turned to South Africa for inspiration, we in South Africa have much to offer to the battered and violated people of Palestine and Israel.

Saber Ahmed Jazbhay
Free Palestine Campaign (Kwazulu-Natal)
South Africa
jazzy@iafrica.com



Platini may have been one of the greatest football players of all time, but this World Cup sees him in a different capacity, criticising the French government for its neglect of the Air France strike and the damage it has wreaked on the tournament. I drew him here with the emphasis on his large, spherical eyes, trained on a far-off object — perhaps a ball as it soars through the sky — and a long, slender nose, pointing straight to the goal on the other side of the field.

All readers' contributions and comments should be addressed to The Editor. E-mail: weekly@ahram.org.eg; Fax: +202 578 6089



Close up

Salama A. Salama

Nuclear or not?

To join the nuclear arms race or not is no longer a relevant question for Egypt, or the Arab or Islamic countries. It is equally futile to deliberate on whether it was right or wrong for Egypt and other Arab states to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in the first place. The time for such questions is long past. No state today can venture on its own to build a nuclear reactor from scratch, certainly not after the Indian and Pakistani tests, which shook the five nuclear powers wide awake. The nuclear states will surely tighten their weapons monopoly and redouble their efforts to prevent the technology from leaking to other countries.

The idea of the "Islamic bomb" is a meaningless slogan, since nuclear technology is irrelevant to faith or religion, wealth or poverty: its exorbitant price is not the issue. The development of nuclear technology is a matter of political will, which reflects a solid domestic situation, insight into national, regional and international challenges, and an awareness of the need to address them. This political will could be represented in a ruling class composed of a politically experienced and qualified elite, as is the case *in India, a politicised military* elite, as is the case in Pakistan, or a ruling elite which combines the two, as is the case in Israel.

The reactions of the five permanent members of the Security Council to the nuclear tests carried out by India and Pakistan rendered certain assumptions, which had underlain the selective nuclear ban policy, null and void. Most of the world community, including Egypt, had been driven to sign nuclear non-proliferation agreements, which gave India and Pakistan every justification to apply their current policy.

The five powers refused to admit India and Pakistan into the club of nuclear states, demanding instead that they halt the arms race, and left the issue at that, taking no further steps towards achieving *total and comprehensive* nuclear disarmament to save humanity from the threat of a nuclear war. India and Pakistan disapproved from the start of the discriminatory treaty that allowed five nuclear states to monopolise nuclear technology, leaving a state like Israel in possession of nuclear warheads, while preventing other nations from acquiring the same capabilities.

The nuclear superpowers themselves — the US and Russia — have not yet ratified the START agreements on strategic disarmament. They continue to possess arsenals which can destroy human civilisation many times over. Both superpowers keep their nuclear test sites open for tests in the future and apply flagrant double standards. How can we be sure that, in a moment of madness, all humanity will be destroyed in a nuclear conflagration?

Some states, which support the partial ban, hold that such irrationality is to be expected only from recent converts to the nuclear creed. But the superpowers are clearly equally deficient in the self-control department. The US did no hesitate to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki into oblivion, and has used highly destructive strategic weapons in Vietnam and Iraq.

The Security Council resolution condemning India and Pakistan has only served to exacerbate tension and increase nuclear anxiety in southeast Asia. But the world order as it appears today was not preordained, nor must our fate be decreed by others. Egypt should review its situation in light of President Mubarak's call for a new international treaty which would eliminate all nuclear arms and weapons of mass destruction everywhere without exception, over a period of 15 to 20 years. While this proposal seems the only way to address nuclear proliferation, nuclear monopolies and double standards, it seems unlikely that the five nuclear powers will agree to it — and will it apply to Israel, too?



Soapbox

Legal eagles

Egypt is *currently witnessing an unprecedented* process of legal reform. Laws that govern and affect economic activities are being amended or abolished, and several new laws are being introduced. Legal reform is an inevitable consequence of the shift toward a market-oriented economic policy. Since laws and regulations are the means of implementing economic policies, the success of our economic transition depends largely on our success in creating a market-friendly legal system. Any market economy, no matter how sophisticated, needs laws and regulations in order to function.

Recent efforts at legal reform, however, have resulted in the creation of an inconsistent and incoherent body of laws and regulations.

In order to rectify these inconsistencies, a legal reform committee headed by President Mubarak should be established, bringing together ministries, politicians and consultants. Among this committee's objectives should be the review of the current shortcomings in our legal system and obstacles that hinder the establishment of a healthy investment environment. The committee should agree upon general guidelines and a framework to govern the reform process.

A list of necessary legal reforms and bills must also be drawn up. The committee should state the priorities of the reform process, and set a time frame, so that the legal and business community can participate in debating new laws.

The current state of affairs leaves much to be desired and could affect the success of our privatisation programme. An integrated vision to govern legal reform is necessary.



Bahaa Alieddin

This week's Soapbox speaker is a lecturer in commercial law at Menoufiya University and a PhD candidate at King's College, London.

Renovation through globalisation

Globalisation and fundamentalism often seem to be two sides of the same coin, writes Milad Hanna. But atomisation, the endorsement of specificity, and rejection of the other, must eventually lead to tolerance, acceptance and the celebration of diversity

The third part of the Barcelona Declaration, signed by the 15 member states of the European Union and the 12 states of the southeastern coast of the Mediterranean, in addition to the Mediterranean island states, has caught my eye. This part is concerned with participation in social, cultural and human affairs, aimed at the enhancement of understanding among cultures and exchanges among civil societies.

The first paragraph states: "Emphasis of dialogue and respect between cultures and religions is a precondition for creating a sense of affinity between different peoples."

This article focuses on the conflict between the *two major religions of the signatories of the* Barcelona Declaration. The evolution of these two religions, and the similarity between them, will lead to dialogue, especially within the framework of globalisation. Although this process can lead to the restoration of fundamentalism, dialogue and the information revolution can lead to cross-fertilisation between Christianity and Islam. This will be the starting point for cultural convergence, and hence the discovery and expansion of common ground. The discovery of shared traits, in turn, will lead to acceptance of the other as a means of achieving coexistence. The process is cumulative, and will take place whenever the aim of dialogue is rapprochement and not the discussion of controversial religious texts.

The Egyptian example of coexistence between Copts and Muslims may be seen as an effective model that has been successful in overcoming obstacles. Egyptian *Islam affected, and,* by the same token, was affected by, Coptic Christianity. Coexistence and acceptance of the other have been possible. By examining this case, it is possible to imagine mechanisms and legislation that could prevent the accumulation of individual or collective frustrations.

The most widespread and influential religions in the world today are Christianity and Islam. Their cultural paths, from inception to globalisation, are similar. Christianity was born almost 2,000 years ago. Its propagation was slow and steady, and probably accomplished verbally through the apostles and disciples of Jesus Christ. The new religion then *spread to* various peoples. When Jews and pagans embraced the new religion, they posed some legitimate questions to the apostles. The answers took the form of what came to be known as the Epistles, which constitute the greater part of the New Testament. *Paul alone wrote 13 of them.* They are considered to be among the most philosophically, intellectually and theologically sophisticated documents of the time. Historical records indicate that the Epistles preceded the Gospels; they were written between *70AD* and *100AD. Subsequently,* the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John appeared.

In less than two centuries, Christianity spread like wildfire. It spread to most of the countries of *Mare Nostrum* (now the Mediterranean Sea). The new faith was fundamentalist and pure, unequivocally stating that "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God".

The history of Christianity, however, is not wholly glorious, contrary to what some who seek to delude their followers would like to believe. Christianity witnessed events and propagated a creed more acceptable in its early years than today. These elements include the infallibility of the Pope and the necessity of absolute obedience to him, as if he were superhuman; disobedience bears *the punishment of excommunication. Indulgences,* through which a place in the kingdom of Heaven was bought, constitute another issue which does not sit easily with the belief systems of today. Then there is the Inquisition, during which the Catholic Church put scientists on trial and sometimes sentenced them to death because their research contradicted scripture or dogma.

In the past few years, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, religion has again become a cultural force to be reckoned with. In parallel, a single superpower emerged and the term "globalisation" was imposed. Some of those who partake in the Western Christian civilisation of Europe felt that the only way of countering the sense of disorientation engendered by globalisation was to return to "fundamentalism". They delved into the heritage of the Christian civilisation and retrieved stories, texts and historical events, which they *identified* as *"basic sources". The proponents of* this new fundamentalism often fitted these texts and events into the modern context of scientific and technological achievements.

In the Western world, an alliance was struck between Jewish and Christian *fundamentalists,* so that the idea of a Judaeo-Christian civilisation became not only culturally acceptable, but an influential trend perhaps most strongly united by its two components' common hatred for Islam. New sects with fundamentalist roots spread, seeking to return to the roots of Christian morality, or to preserve "family values". Most visible in the US, such groups captured the attention of the media. The "Promise Keepers", for instance, were able to organise an event last October in which more than a million individuals participated. The Jehovah's Witnesses were also rejuvenated. Religious fundamentalism, in other words, is not limited to Egypt. It is *rife* in the West, albeit in different forms.

If we study Islamic civilisation from inception to globalisation, we find common aspects with Christianity, which may be so far-reaching as to constitute an "intellectual system". Islam started out *as an ascetic, idealised religion.* Persecuted because of their new message, its earliest adherents engaged in a "holy war", a mission eventually transformed into a religious duty. Their flight to Madina was also enshrined as one of the pillars of Islam. The epoch of the Rightly-guided Caliphs was eventful and rich. But before the growth of a vast Islamic empire during the Umayyad period, division and strife had broken out. Divisions between Sunnis and Shi'ites have lasted until today.

Islamic civilisation witnessed recurrent periods of schism and unification. As was the case for Christianity, Islam witnessed periods of tolerance and intellectual efflorescence, as well as epochs of tyranny and violence.

There are events and texts in both Islamic and Christian civilisation that reflect rejection of other *cultures, as well as elements of compassion,* empathy and acceptance.

The national liberation movements of the twentieth century opposed modern Western imperialism, for the most part, and reflected a desire for emancipation and self-determination. Some of these movements represented a fusion between national and religious liberation, as was the case of the Mahdi in Sudan and the Algerian liberation movement.

As globalisation spread throughout the '90s, the United States, the sole remaining global superpower, attempted to present this process as one of Americanisation, i.e., the dominance of the consumerism and materialism inherent in the "American way of life".

This trend has mobilised other civilisations including the Islamic civilisation. Globalisation in its crude outward form became a pretext for a *return to the roots of one's culture or civilisation,* generally known as fundamentalism. Political movements emerged, calling upon society to conform to its earliest patterns of behaviour. This was truly what Samuel Huntington described as the "clash of civilisations".

In the Muslim world, the fundamentalist trend evolved from the "Islamic awakening" to "political Islam". In a country like Egypt, where the 1923 Constitution embodied liberal ideals, the general cultural climate abruptly became biased in favour of religious thought. This was the case for both Christianity and Islam. The gradual rise of national identity would have constituted the natural course of events, but history often evolves in unexpected directions. Globalisation and issues of cultural identity became important. The debate was not limited to abstract thought, but also had an impact on political equilibrium, domestically and internationally.

Globalisation has released the potential energies of religious civilisations as one aspect of the fight to preserve cultural identity and specificity. "Acceptance of the other" is no longer an easy matter. *Tolerance and acceptance could only be simple in* a period during which liberal or left-wing ideas prevailed.

A sense of religious belonging provides spiritual and emotional security, a basic human need during this critical transitional period. Belonging is a source of pride for the faithful. Religious ardour is a prerequisite of *jihad*, the degree of enthusiasm for which varies from one individual to the other.

The other side of the coin is that, however different religions may be, they must contain values and concepts which are acceptable to all humanity. Had it not been for that dimension, human beings would have continued to engage in perpetual warfare until the conflict had been decisively resolved in favour of a certain religion. Religious concepts, however, have continually evolved from one period to the other to match human emotional and spiritual needs, which change in space and time.

Within this framework, it was possible in the past and will be in the future to create a cultural climate of coexistence between religions by discovering common ground with regard to values and concepts, different creeds notwithstanding. As cultural orientations in general grow and became more refined in any society, so do we come to discover the richness resulting from that diversity and become more amenable to seeing the positive aspects of "accepting the other": acceptance of another dogma, creed, race or culture, or at least acceptance of coexistence.

This concept may have been the pivotal point of the Report on Culture and Development, entitled "Creative Human Diversity" and prepared by a group of distinguished intellectuals under the leadership of Javier Perez de Cuellar, a former *secretary-general of the United Nations,* which was published in 1995. The Supreme Council for Culture in Egypt translated and published this document in full. An international conference entitled "The Power of Culture", held in Stockholm from 30 March until 2 April this year, endorsed a plan of action to which governments are bound when they formulate their cultural policy. This, of course, will be impossible in the Arab world unless intellectuals, regardless of individual orientation, endorse the ideas advocated by this significant document.

The world is at a crossroads. Globalisation is taking its course, affecting the economy, the military, media, culture, machines and politics. It is futile to entertain the delusion that this current can be halted. Globalisation has indeed led to the emergence of fundamentalism — a natural attempt to prevent disorientation and alienation. Globalisation itself, however, will resolve the conflict through the increasing supply of increasingly detailed information. Civilisations will get to know one another, not with the objective of waging war, but by searching for common ground and enjoying the *beauty and richness of diversity. This leads to creativity* and renovation, which in turn creates a better society.

Meeting for the sake of it

Abdel-Moneim Said wonders whether, why and how an Arab summit will be held, and what the agenda will be

Will there be an Arab summit or not? If it is held, will it be open to all Arab countries, or will there be one or two exceptions? Or is it to be a mini-summit? In that case, which countries will attend and what standards will determine inclusion or exclusion? And if a mini-summit is to be held, is it to constitute a prelude to a full-scale summit, or will it be an end in itself? Will the agenda include the full range of Arab issues, or will it be restricted to discussion of the Arab-Israeli conflict? If the latter is the case, what is to be done about the many other issues that are of no less importance, such as the continued international blockade and sanctions against certain Arab countries, the tens of thousands of Algerians who have died in the country of a million martyrs, or the 300,000 Sudanese who may succumb to famine in the coming summer months? How long will the dispute between Iraq and Kuwait continue to be passed over on Arab summit agendas, and can we really convene another summit without ascertaining that the resolutions of previous meetings have been put into effect?

These are *some* of the many questions that have been put to Arab public opinion over the past weeks. The questions have yet to be met with clear answers. All the Arab regimes want to hold the summit, but beyond this there is not the slightest consensus over any of the details. Indeed, the tendency is to skip over these thorny issues and to reiterate the advantages of the summit as a venue where the Arabs can come together in unison so that we can rise as one to the enormous challenges that confront us all.

The familiar proclamation adds nothing to what we already know. The fact that the sun rises in the east every day means nothing unless we connect it with the succession of night and day, the course of the seasons and their implications in terms of sowing and harvesting, the provision of food and clothing, the ebb and flow of the tides, and the movement of airplanes in the sky and ships on the sea.

The fact is that the Arabs have made summits into an end in themselves, an institution unparalleled anywhere else in the world. Arab summits are the only events of which the convening is an aim in and of itself, because it is an indication that the pan-Arab nation still exists. Although it meets irregularly, every time it does meet all the problems of the Arab nation are thrust upon it in one go and it is expected to solve them all in the space of two days. As this is impossible, a single issue tends to dominate: the Palestinian cause. After dealing with that issue, every country is accorded a line or two in the closing statement in order to satisfy the participants' publicity demands. Then, since every Arab country has its particular strategic priorities, no sooner do the leaders return to their respective homes than they turn their attention to their own pressing concerns.

The Algerians want to end the strife that has gone on for too long, the Iraqis and Libyans manoeuvre to end the blockade imposed on their countries, the Sudanese are pressed by blockade, civil war and famine, the Kuwaitis want to ascertain that the events of 1990 will never repeat themselves, the people of the UAE want the islands usurped by Iran restored to them, the Qataris press their claims on the island disputed by the Bahrainis, and the Moroccans want to keep their hold on the Western Sahara. The discrepancy between the agenda of the summit and the strategic priorities of the member nations is what hampers its convening. If a summit meeting does take place, once the attendant media hype subsides, it dawns on all of us that we need another summit.

This phenomenon does not occur in the case of European summit meetings, the meetings of the G8, NATO summits or, for that matter, any other such high-level gathering in the world. That is because those meetings are backed by a highly efficient network of institutions and relationships that enable the various parties to voice, with the utmost candour, their diverse concerns and priorities. Then, after airing these, they engage in the process of filtering out those interests over which there is an element of agreement from those over which there are differences. Once the agenda is settled, they determine the time-frame for each of the parties to fulfill their allotted obligations and the capacities each country can contribute to achieving collective aims.

Intensive pre-summit networking enables the participants to reach a minimal level of consensus. Thus, when the summit is finally held, it can devote attention to capitalising on accomplishments and, from there, determining collective aims several years, or even decades, down the line.

This is the internationally recognised model for arranging summit meetings. I wonder if we will be able to learn from it.

The writer is the director of the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies.

Over the razor's edge

David Blake enjoys seeing Moushira Issa carrying home the honey

Cairo Symphony Orchestra; Oriental Inspiration V; Moushira Issa, piano and Taha Nagui, conductor; Main Hall, Cairo Opera House; 6 June

This concert really began circa 1937. The Condé Nast Empire flourished. *Vogue*, its star, influenced everything. Something elegant, something mad — everything before the crash.

The first movement of Beethoven's *Piano concerto in C major, op. 15, no. 1* began in this capsule. There was Moushira Issa, looking wonderfully high fashion, at the piano, playing stylishly, rather like one's elder sister. Arms fine and fingers neatly expressive in a way long gone. Concerts were not gigs in those far off thirties days.

And there was Taha Nagui conducting a rather chastened Cairo Symphony Orchestra. Nagui is strange. He plods then suddenly ignites surprises. But at the opening of this concert he stuck to plods.

1937 was a precarious time warp in the 20th century's savagely torn fabric. However beautiful things looked, there were nasty shadows on the walls. Would we go along, therefore, ignoring heart-break house on this trip through the concerto?

It is riven with doubts and fears as Beethoven carefully erupted passages of fun, hope and joy. He was young, and this is young music, however fraught. It offers little but its physicality, and this is the thing that troubles: *angst appears even in these early* days. Beethoven was a seismic instrument for his time, and his time is still ours. He was voracious for fame, covetous, treacherous. He wrote this work for a specific purpose — himself as a performer. He needed it. He wished to knock out all comers, leaving himself number one in Vienna's musical ring. The *C major* did this for him, and he was to remain number one until he died — and a long time after. What a concerto.

Moushira Issa can be a great performer. Moody, often afflicted, but she has tremendous bravery and panache. It is better to hear her failures than most pianists' successes. Her authority can, however, crack, and out comes a genuinely possessed artist, afraid, vulnerable and heroic. Then her music thrills.

After the first movement of the *C major*, her time had come. Nagui's tempi did not seem to suit her. She was not comfortable, and discomfort in the second movement is just what is needed. This movement was written by Beethoven to revenge himself on other pianists and to embarrass them. So he debunked them and almost the piano itself. The writing is a history of almost every difficulty that can lie in wait for a pianist. Land mines, booby traps and monkey puzzles, black-outs and sudden bitter-sweet lights that appear before the player like deliberate physical set-ups. Issa went for it. She had the tension, and so she had a go, and so the thrills began.

What sort of a pianist was Beethoven? We have no recordings of him, but the Czech writer Vaclav Tomasek, who heard every player from Mozart to the *1840s* said no one ever approached Beethoven as a pianist; he had god-like powers. Like Verdi and Mozart he could be very nasty to his performers. In this concerto, apart from the shell-like cloak *of virtuosity he demands, he adds* something else, another element, wordless, almost noteless, something demonic, mostly way out of reach of even the best virtuoso. Enter the musician, the artist.

And so again to Issa. Some do not like her tone; it can get papery and at times thin. She can hover and pounce, moth-like, but the deep rich tones often mostly evade her. Beethoven, even in prankish mood, needs them. She did her best. The first movement had long singing patches in which she produced a new resonance, though the bell chimes effect is not for her. She goes for metal, not satin, and her metal seems to be zirconium, every flight an attack, flashes of light, no rest at all. This did not suit Taha Nagui. So it was exciting. She did what a lot of players do — went it alone. She had had enough of 1937 and so, with some lightning flash chords and icy runs and a tug at her neckline, let go into the *largo* movement and we were where we belong: in 1998.

Excitement is always uppermost when we listen to a genuinely aroused pianist with a mind wrestling, like Jacob, with a challenge. Issa was on the field of action, alone and *hopeful*. She was in a mood of revelation and made direct contact with her audience, a person-to-person *feel. Articulation* on the *strange* showy runs, exactitude in the cross handed playing at high speed, droplets of sound darting up the keyboard — always her mind in full operation.

Like a lawyer, she laid out the architecture. There was something queer going on behind the social manner of the music. She found it. She was full of contention. No more elliptical, paranoid evasions in her conversation with Beethoven, but: "I am become she who has come to collect the debt of your spend thrift life". And, head down, Issa enters the third movement. She has changed everything around; even her tone now fits her musical conception.

The spooks and hauntings in the music suit her. She lays out delicate filigree sounds as tormenting shadows. They fit 1998. She becomes a breath, not a lump of tone. This is willful. Where is the power? She summons all she has and, as before, in the fray, grows smaller and thinner. The weird faltering end she accomplishes perfectly in time, and hurls into the last three chords which were ruined for her by Nagui's orchestral tutti. But she had crossed the razor's edge herself, alone to victory.

What had come before and after this exhilaration of the piano was the *Intermezzo* from Aziz El-Shawan's opera *Anas El-Wogood*. The music is good, but the last production had a curse upon it. It needs a total reset.

Then came Alaa El-Din Mustafa's *Misr Symphonic Poem*. Quite long, and full of curving bay-like sequences like the Corniche of Alexandria. Used as a repeat of quite decorative Oriental-sounding climaxes, they had power. But too many repeats diminish the melody until it becomes a parody of itself. And so it rolled alone like a shoal of diving dolphins.

The end came with Borodin's *Polovtsian Dances* from *Prince Igor*. Always we have football-muscled Russian males hurling themselves into space in ballet sequences which help the West to love Russian ballet. They used to go straight up into the air, zip around a few times, come down landing on one knee in strict time, get up, walk to the footlights and wave good-bye. Just a ball of muscle. Prince Igor was here.

Art

Henna and highlights

Seeking the wood and the trees. **Nigel Ryan** on looks for sylvan scenes

There is a particular shade of orange that is the result of applying *henna to greying hair*. It is a colour that dominates the current exhibition of recent works by Mahmoud Hamed showing at the Mashrabiya Gallery. Nor, thinking of it, should the hair analogy end there. Dying, after all, is an act of presentation. A bad dye job constitutes a presentational problem, of which this show has several.

Mahmoud Hamed's works attempt a lot. In some, fluff grows like penicillin in streaks across the layered surfaces. Bits and pieces punctuate the surface. Cryptograms are scratched in, esoteric symbols; scraps of printed paper, of corrugated card, are glued on. String, combed into miniature horses' tails, spills over, and there is the occasional glinting of gold paint. Bits of scrap metal appear, of wire mesh, embedded in the oleaginous surfaces. And they are all heavily impastoed, all — in places at least — glossily encaustic.

The problem is not that they look like bas reliefs, carved in dark wood, but that large areas look like plasticised copies of bas reliefs carved in dark wood. This, one might suppose at first, is because by far the majority are exhibited behind glass, a material notoriously unkind to any attempt at subtle textural differentiation. Glass *tends to reduce everything* to the same register, flattening beneath its glare. Yet the most three dimensional pieces, those that it proved impossible to encase behind glass because the accessorising bits and pieces hang over the frame, or spill just a bit too far from the surface, remain, perversely, just as problematic. Their three-dimensionality is, quite simply, too self conscious.

Perhaps Mahmoud Hamed is attempting too much in *what are, after all, small pieces*. What, one wonders, would happen if he exploded the size, did similar things on a much larger scale? Perhaps then the works would be allowed to breath, in a manner that would offset the claustrophobia caused, not just by the density of the picture surface, but by the presence of so much clutter. The effect, one assumes, would be similar to taking the *contents* of a heavily furnished, mid-Victorian parlour and spreading them out across the floor of a warehouse. Individual elements would become visible, and in doing so, might assume the significance which they are obviously intended to carry.

The dilemma of the glass is further compounded by the mounting of several pieces on Japanese paper, far too translucent, too delicate a material to do anything *other than draw* attention to the heavy handed density of the painted surfaces.

And what to make of all the scratched symbols, the boats, the schematised figures, the stars of David, the *wheels?* They recur, but how are they meant to be read? In pieces so seemingly determined to display the elements and processes of construction, such opaque signifiers become confusing.

A difficult exhibition to like, then, but one that has its consolations. I rather enjoyed the experience of mentally dismembering several of these pieces, and then reassembling them in different configurations. Whether or not this is a valid response is something that need not be addressed here. In such satiated times any exhibition that elicits a reaction should not be glibly discounted.

Among the most successful pieces is the triptych, with a wall to itself in the right hand gallery. Tellingly, it is the largest piece in the exhibition. And while the three components of the triptych contain much the same elements as the rest of the exhibition, by being hung apart, by being separated, they are allowed to breath. The claustrophobia induced all too easily by other, smaller works, is thus dispelled. The components out of which Mahmoud Hamed constructs his paintings become suddenly visible. And suddenly the spectator realises that he does *not construct them* badly, does, indeed, do many things rather well. At last you see the wood and the trees, which is surely the best vantage point.

Mahmoud Hamed shows recent works at the Mashrabiya. For full details see Listings

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Robert Capa (Photographs)
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 11 June.
36 photographs by one of the century's most celebrated photojournalists.

Ketty Abdel-Malek (Mosaics) & Sameh El-Banawi (Paintings)
Extra Gallery, 3 Al-Nessim St, corner of Montaza St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc sun, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 12 June.

David D'Agostino (Mixed media on paper)
Cataracts Gallery, 5 Road 231, Degla, Maadi. Daily exc Sun, 11am-9pm. Until 12 June.

Collective Exhibition (Photography)
Italian Cultural Centre, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Daily exc Fri & Sat. Until 13 June.
Twenty photographers of the Pioneers of Photography in Egypt Association exhibit their work.

Brecht Posters
Goethe Institute, 5 Al-Bostan St, Downtown. Tel 575 9877. Mon-Thu 1pm-7pm, Fri 8 am-noon. Until 15 June.
Exhibition of original posters of Brecht productions to mark the 100th anniversary of his birth.

Mohamed Abla
Goethe Institute, 5 Al-Bostan St, Downtown. Tel 575 9877. Mon-Thu 1pm-7pm. Fri 8am-noon. Until 15 June.
New paintings and installations under the title The Nile.

Marina Evtyeeva and Mohamed Salwat (Paintings)
Cervantes Institute for Spanish Culture, 20 Boulos Hanna St, Dokki. Tel 360 1746. Daily exc Fri & Sat, until 16 June.

Mahmoud Hamed
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Daily exc Fri, 11am-8pm. Until 18 June.

Emilio Garcia Gomez (Publications)
Greater Cairo Library, Zamalek. Opening 14 June, 5pm. Daily, until 18 June.
Two lectures on the subject, to be announced on the exhibition programme, will be held at the library.

Paul Rinaldi (Paintings and Photographs)
Ragab Gallery, 3 Al-Nil St, Giza (next to the Cairo Yacht Club). Tel 348 8177. Daily 10am-2pm & 6pm-10pm. Until 20 June.
Works under the title The Seventh Seal.

Nefissa El-Bakly and Safwat Abbas
French Cultural Institute, 1 Madraset Al-Hoqouq Al-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. Daily exc Fri & Sat, until 21 June.
The former exhibits works under the title Jeux d'Enfants, the latter, Portraits.


Ketty Abdel-Malek

Faenza Ceramics
Al-Hanager, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 341 6861. Daily, 10am-10pm. Until 22 June.
100 original precious pieces tracing the history of Faenza ceramics from the Middle Ages until now.

Mona Marzouk & Amina Mansour (Paintings and Sculptures)
Greek Consulate General, 63 Alexander the Great avenue, Shatby, Alexandria. Tel (03) 485-8454/5. Daily exc Sun, 4pm-8pm; Sat, 10am-1pm. Until June 27.

Adam Henein (Sculptures and Paintings)
Espace Gallery, 1 Al-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily exc Thur, 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 28 June.
Works under the title Passages.

Art For All
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily exc Fri, 10am-2.30pm & 5pm-9pm. Until end of June.
Works by over 20 artists.

Young Artists 98
Khan El-Maghraby Gallery, 18 Al-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-9.30pm. Until the end of the month.

Jean-Pierre Ribière
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5424. Opening June 15, 7pm. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 16 July.
Thirty-two black and white photographs by the French artist, reflecting the ever-evolving cosmopolitan character of the city, under the title Fugitive Moments.

Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1, Kafour Al-Akhshidi St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10 am-6 pm.
Egypt's largest collection of 19th century European art

FILMS

The Cherry Orchard
Japanese Information and Culture Centre, 106 Qasr Al-Aini St, Garden City. 11 June, 6pm.
Directed by Shun Nakahara (1990).

Italian Films
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791.
13 June, 7pm: Il Portiere Di Notte (1974), dir L. Cavani.
14 June, 7pm: Amarcord (1973), dir F. Fellini.

Blood Wedding
Cervantes Institute annex, 20 Adly St, Kodak passage. Tel 395 2326. 16 June, 7.30pm.
Carlos Saura's (1981) screen adaptation of Lorca's play.

Ibn El-Nil (Nile Boy)
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref St (ex-Bustan), Bab Al-Louq. Tel 575 9877. 11 June, 7pm:
Directed by Youssef Chahin (1951).

German Films
Goethe Institute, as above.
16 June, 7pm: Für Immer Und Immer (For Ever and Ever), directed by Hark Bohm (1996).
17 June, 7pm: Films by director Mahmoud Abdel-Samei (check with venue).

French Films
French Cultural Institute, 1 Madraset Al-Hoqouq Al-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679.
15 June, 8pm: Rien du Tout, dir by Cedric Klapisch.
17 June, 8pm: Les Rendez-Vous de Paris, dir by Eric Rohmer.

Notice:
Commercial cinemas change foreign films on Wednesday and local films on Monday. The information provided is valid at the time of going to press. It is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For more information, contact the venue.

Titanic
Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 1084. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. El-Haram, Al-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8158. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Home Alone 3
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm; The midnight Drive In, entrance of Al-Shorouq City, Cairo-Ismailia desert road. Tel 012-219 0831. Daily 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Thur & Fri midnight show. Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 1084. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 3.30pm & 6.30pm.

Seven Years in Tibet
Al-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Cairo Sheraton, Al-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. Odeon II, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Starship Troopers
Normandy, 31 Al-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

As Good As It Gets
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Odeon I, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Renaissance, World Trade Centre, Corniche Al-Nil, Maspero. Tel 580 4039. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

George of the Jungle
Odeon III, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Normandy Open Air, 31 Al-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 8pm.

Extreme Measures
MGM Kolleyyat Al-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Face/Off
Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Dantella (Lace)
Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Cairo, Sarrai Al-Azbakia St, Off Ahmed Urabi Sq, Downtown. Tel 574 5350. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
Youssra and Elham Shahin quarrel over the same man

El-Batal (The Hero)
Diana, 17 Al-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 592 4727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 593 4284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 6pm & 9pm. Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 8pm & 10pm.

Gabr Al-Khawater (Consolation)
Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 392 7460. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Ismailia Rayeh Gaie (Ismailia Back and Forth)
Rivoli II, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

DANCE

Song of the Whales
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St, Abdin. Tel 391 9956. Until 17 June, 9pm.
A performance by the Cairo Opera Dance Theatre Company, directed by Walid Aouni.

MUSIC

National Arabic Music Ensemble
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 339 8144. 11 June, 9pm.
Conducted by Selim Sahab.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 13 June, 9pm.
Compositions by Bernstein, Copland, Blake, Thompson, Wright and Joplin, performed by Butch Thompson (piano) and Mohamed Hamdy (clarinet), conducted by Michael Lanner.

Soloists of the Cairo Symphony Orchestra
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 339 8144. 14 May, 9 pm.
Compositions by Debussy, Manuel De Falla and Ravel.

Cultural Opera Salon
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 17 June, 9pm.

THEATRE

Isabella, Tre Caravelle E Un Cacciaballe (Isabella, Three Ships and A Scoundrel)
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. 17 June, 7pm.
The screening of a recorded stage adaptation of Dario Fo's play, in Italian.

Oedipus
El-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Until end of June, 8pm.
Scripted by Jean Cocteau and directed by Mohamed Metwalli.

Shafiqa Wa Metwalli (Shafiqa and Metwalli)
Al-Ghad Hall, Balloon Theatre, Corniche Al-Nil. Tel 304 3187. Daily, 10.30pm.

Al-'Arid (The Model)
Puppet Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 0954. Daily, 9pm.

Khat Ahmar (Red Line)
Al-Tali'a, Ataba Sq. Tel 593 7948. Daily, 10pm.

Hubb Ma Qabl Al-Rahil (Love Before Departure)
National, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 2267/7783. Daily, 8.30pm.

LECTURES

Siwa and The Oracles
Egypt Exploration Society, British Council, 192 Al-Nil St, Agouza. Tel 301 8319. 11 June, 7pm.
Lecture by Dr Clive Broadhurst, Egyptologist, Cardiff University.

The 98 Generation and Its Andalusian Antecedents
Cervantes Institute, 20 Boulos Hanna St, Dokki. Tel 360 1746/337 1962. 15 June, 8 pm.
Lecture, in Arabic, with a Spanish handout, by Dr Mahmoud Mekki.

Enjeux Politiques et Economiques d'Une Technique de Droit des Affaires: Les Programmes Offset sur Les Emirats Arabes Unis
CEDEJ, 14 Dr Abdel-Rahman Al-Sawi St, Mohandessin. Tel 361 1932. 16 June, 5pm.
Lecture, in French, by Dr Jean-Francois Rycx, CEDEJ.

A Meeting With Adam Henein
French Cultural Institute, 1 Madraset Al-Hoqouq Al-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. 16 June, 7pm.

Reconsiderations in the Economic History of the Middle East: Ottoman Economies and Economics
Oriental Hall, Main Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5062. 13 June.
11am-1.30pm: Speaking in Tongues: The Late Ottomanisation of Egyptian Historiography and the Elimination of Social Communication from the Mohamed Ali Period (in Arabic) by Mohamed Hakim. The Fortunes of "Ulama" and Their Effects on Their Political Roles, 1790-1885 (in Arabic) by Dr Magdi Abdel-Hafiz. Artisans in Early Nineteenth Century Cairo (in English) by Pascale Ghazaleh. Family Structure in Ottoman Palestine: A Study on Class and Gender in Palestine in the 18th and 19th Centuries (in English) by Fatma Al-Zahra Laghi.
2.30pm-5.30pm: The Tikkiyas of Mecca and Madina in the Nineteenth Century (in Arabic) by Dara Santina. Financial Resources of Judges in Egypt in the Eighteenth Century (in Arabic) by Abdel-Raziq Issa. Trade in Indian Textiles During the Ottoman Period (in Arabic) by Hussam Abdel-Mu'ti.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.

Please send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Around the galleries

AL-QUDS, the *intifida*, Palestinian refugees and martyrs are the subject of abstract, dramatically charged paintings by **Ahmed Nawar** on exhibit at **Duroub Gallery**. This in commemoration of 50 years of the occupation of Palestine.

Paintings and ink and pencil drawings, 65 in all, by **Samy Rizq** are on show at the **Opera Gallery**. An obsession with death — shrouded hollow bodies, coffins, indeed all the paraphernalia of the funeral parlour — pervade these supposed, though rather obviously so, "surrealist" works.

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**


Samy Rizq

or E-mail fasle@hotmail.com

prehensive peace the enemies of peace".

Brecht and Lorca a century on: Both born one hundred years ago this month, both seminal influences on Arabic literature



Memories of lost cities

A rare photograph of Lorca, right, walking with friends near New York's Columbia University, in the city that served as back drop to *Poet in New York*

Frederico Garcia Lorca, whose centennial celebrations this week include the release of rare photographs, was the Andalusian poet par excellence, and exercised a towering influence on Arab poetry. Commenting on Lorca's 1928 *Romancero gitano* (Gypsy-Ballad Book), Arab novelist Abdel-Rahman Mounif has written: "As in *Llanto por la muerte de Ignacio Sanchez Mejias'*, *Romancero gitano* is replete with striking epiphanic images that powerfully give voice to the life/death duality. One of life's greatest ironies is that it, life — with the wealth, variety, pleasure and beauty it offers and of which humans must drink to the lees — cannot be discovered except through its opposite, its inseparable paramour, death. Latent in life, lying in wait for all creatures, particularly humans who are possessed of awareness and memory, is death. Even if tragic, even when denied, death has the logic of the inevitable... the last station of this journey which is not without cruelty and absurdity."

Performances of Lorca's plays, particularly his three tragedies — *Blood Wedding* (*Bodas de sangre*,1933), *Yerma* (1934) and *The House of Bernarda Alba* (*La casa de Bernarda Alba*, 1936) — were a staple of the Egyptian theatre's repertoire in the 1960s.

In perhaps his most celebrated poem *Llanto por la muerte de Ignacio Sanchez Mejias* (Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias) Lorca wrote:

"If I die
Leave the window open.
The child to eat an orange
(I would see him from my window)
The peasant to harvest the wheat
(I would hear him from my window)
If I die
Then leave the window open."

His influence has been incorporated into the very veins of Arabic poetry, resonating in the work of Amal Donqol, and more recently, in Mahmoud Darwish's *Eleven Stars over Andalusia*, which contains echoes from *Llanto por la muerte de Ignacio Sanchez Mejias*:

"I know that time
Cannot twice be on my side, and I know that I will leave
My banner a bird that never alights on trees in the garden
I shall shed my skin, and my language
Some of my words of love will fall into
The poetry of Lorca who will live in my bedroom
And see what I have seen of the Bedouin moon."

Lorca himself was perfectly aware of these affinities and in a lecture, delivered on 19 February, 1922 in Grenada, he acknowledged the connections:

"Just as in the *siguiriya* [the prototypical song form of the *cante jondo*, Andalusian songs also used in flamenco] and in its daughter genres, are to be found the most ancient oriental elements, so in many poems of *cante jondo* there is an affinity to the oldest oriental verse. When our songs reach the extremes of pain and love they come very close in expression to the magnificent verses of Arab and Persian poets.
The truth is that in the air of Cordoba and Grenada one still finds gestures and traces of remote Arabia, and that from the turbid palimpsest *albaicin* arises memories of lost cities."

To mark the centenary of Lorca's birthday, the Cervantes Institute for Spanish Culture is screening Carlos Saura's cinema adaptation of Blood Wedding *(see Listings, opposite).*



In his brilliant book, *Brecht; A Choice of Evils*, Martin Esolin astutely observes that while Brecht intended his theatre to be popular and address the masses and the working classes, he, ironically, ended up as the pet of elite theatrical circles and "the daily coinage of dramatic critics." This actually describes the situation in the sixties, when the first Brecht play ever performed in Egypt burst upon the scene. *The Exception and the Rule* (translated by Abdel-Ghaffar Mekkawi and directed by Farouk El-Demerdash) was presented in 1963 at the Pocket Theatre, which catered for a small, elitist audience. It would have been even more of an irony had Brecht received his Egyptian premiere at The Royal Automobile Club, the Pocket Theatre's former home. Luckily (for Brecht), it had burnt down a few months earlier. The company's new home, at the Pharaonic Garden Theatre in Zamalek, where the play was presented, was equally small, but, at least, it was not forbiddingly smart, and overlooked the Nile, to boot. (The building still stands but is used at present as a TV studio.)

The person responsible for bringing Brecht to Egypt and popularising his theories is director Saad Ardash. He first came across Brecht's works in 1961 while on a scholarship in Italy. "I felt I had stumbled upon a treasure," he says describing the impact of the discovery; "his theatre seemed perfectly suited to the needs of the moment and the national goals of the '52 Revolution." An inveterate socialist, with a deep-seated belief in the political role of theatre, Ardash still maintains that Brecht's epic theatre, with its pronounced socialist slant, is the most appropriate theatrical mode for the third world "where people are still fighting for their freedom and rights."

It was at Ardash's instigation that El-Demerdash undertook the production of *The Exception and the Rule* in '63 (it opened in December the same year). At the time, Ardash was the artistic director of the Pocket Theatre (which he was instrumental in founding), and had launched the company, a year earlier, with the Arab premiere of Beckett's *Endgame*, which he directed (in a sombre vein); it was followed by the Arab premiere of Ionesco's *The Chairs*, directed by Mohammed Abdel-Aziz. Two absurd plays in a row seemed a curious choice for a socialist and committed artist, and the word "turncoat" was mentioned. But then, Ardash's commitment is not of the bigoted, narrow-minded type. "When I came back from Italy," he says, "there were two things I wanted to do: to introduce the new trends in world theatre by way of experiment through the Pocket Theatre, and to try out the epic theatre to test its potential and appeal to the audience here."

Why *The Exception and the Rule* in particular?

"It is short and straightforward; for an audience bred on traditional realistic drama, it would not be too shocking, we thought."

But social realism, which had established itself on the Egyptian stage (at the hands of No'man Ashour and Saad Wahba, among others) as the theatrical mode most favoured by the public since the beginning of the fifties, put up a good fight. It was not until three years later, after Brecht's theories had been translated, explicated, controverted and propagated (and quoted in support of a multitude of contradictory causes) that another Brecht play found its way to the Egyptian stage — precisely to the stage of the Pocket Theatre, and two years after Ardash had resigned his post as its head.

Drums in the Night (translated by Abdel-Rahman Badawi, to whom we owe most of our Arabic versions of Brecht's plays, and directed by Kamal Eid) appeared in 1966, and gave Egyptian critics and audiences a different glimpse and taste of Brechtian writing. The play, which was written in 1918, belongs to Brecht's early nihilistic, anarchic stage: the critics could relax, take a holiday from ideological criticism, and dwell on the novelty of its expressionistic techniques. The production was like "a big stone thrown into stagnant waters," Ardash says. It must have been wonderful not having to talk about propaganda and didacticism, but about theatre art and expressionism.

Ardash was quick to capitalise on the success of *Drums*; within a few months he was staging Abdel-Rahman Badawi's translation of "The Good Soul of Setzuan" (*Der Gute Mensch von Sezuan*), with that redoubtable actress, Samiha Ayyoub, in the lead, and with a prestigious artistic crew which included Salah Jahin (lyrics), Sayed Mekkawi (music) Awatef Abdel-Karim (sets) and Layla Gad (choreography). Reading through the old, 1966, numbers of the *Theatre Magazine*, one is infected with the same sense of urgency and excitement that marked the reception of this play so long ago.

Brecht's precepts, Ardash admits, were not adhered to to the letter. "I was aware I was dealing with an Egyptian audience, well-tuned to realism." So, as one gathers from the reviews (I did not see the production), Brecht's "Alienation-Effect", particularly where acting and stage-design were concerned, became the focus of critical controversy. As Dr Farouk Abdel-Wahab, who translated Brecht's *A Short Organum for Theatre*, and published it the same year, said: "Critics and academics squabbled over the method of acting chosen by Ardash: was it too emotional? too naturalistic? or simply 'demonstrational' as Brecht had advised?"

Brecht's essays on acting were diligently consulted by some and glibly quoted, parrot-fashion, by others; but since no one at the time had actually seen a production by Brecht or had first-hand experience of how this new technique of acting works, the controversy could not be resolved. Dr Lewis Awad, however, highly commended the show and, more importantly, the audience loved it. Unlike the two former Brecht plays, *The Good Soul* was presented at the much larger and more popular (now defunct) El-Hakim Theatre in Emadeddin Street.

By that time, the influence of Brecht's theories had already begun to manifest itself in the work of Egyptian directors and playwrights, such as Karam Metaweh, Alfred Farag and Naguib Sorour. In 1965, Farag's epic play *Suliman Al-Halabi* was followed by Sorour's *Yasin and Baheya*, a long narrative poem, staged by Metaweh. The same year, Ardash gave Sophocles's *Antigone* a pronouncedly Brechtian production, and two years later, Mahmoud Diab, who had displayed in his earlier plays a marked bias for the kind of drama evolved by the Italian Pirandello (another important influence on Egyptian drama in the sixties), switched loyalties and joined Brecht's disciples with his magnum opus *Bab Al-Futuh* (Conquerors' Gate) which Ardash directed. None of these works, and many more, would have been possible without Brecht's liberating influence. Of his generation of playwrights, Farag says: "Realism had begun to pall on us, and we had two alternatives: the theatre of the absurd and Brecht's epic theatre. We opted for the latter. We needed a theatre that could grapple with our social problems and such hot political issues as capitalism, fascism, colonialism and justice. We rejected the absurd on ideological and artistic grounds. Brecht offered us a new theatrical formula that enabled us, without direct preaching or hectoring, to make the spectator adopt an attitude of inquiry and criticism and, in Brecht's words, to purge the stage and auditorium of everything magical and hypnotic."

There was also the natural affinity between the type of theatre Brecht advocated and the indigenous Egyptian forms of popular entertainment, as Ardash perceptively adds. The Egyptian temperament has a natural inclination for comedy, song and dance, and Brecht's theories sanctioned their use and made them ideologically respectable. No wonder Brecht's recipe for a popular theatre was eagerly embraced by the regional companies and has been functioning quite well up until now. For many provincial theatres, such essays as *On Unprofessional Acting*, *The Street Scene*, *Notes on the Folk Play*, *Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction*, *The Popular and the Realistic*, provided the kind of legitimation they needed and were the stuff out of which they spun their manifestos.

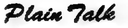
In 1968 Ardash wanted to give the Egyptian theatre a further, and stronger injection of Brecht: a theatre director from East Germany (his name is Kurt Viet, if I remember correctly, Ardash says) was invited to direct *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* for the Pocket Theatre. But soon enough, the German's punctilious sense of time clashed with the Egyptian lax and elastic comprehension of time: he left in a huff, and Ardash ended up directing *The Chalk Circle*.

It was not until the eighties that another Brecht play was performed in Egypt. *Mother Courage and her Children* was premiered at the Citadel, and Ardash tells me that Layla Abu Seif's production was quite riveting. Others whisper that she had a hard time putting up with the loud calls for prayer vociferously issued during the performance by the *mu'azzin* of the mosque nearby. I was not in Egypt at the time, and by the time I came back, Abu Seif had left for the States for good.

Nevertheless, Brecht survived: not just in Naguib Sorour's Egyptian version of *The Three-penny Opera* (re-christened *The King of Beggars* (1968), which was re-adapted by poet Izzat Abdel-Wahab and directed by Abdel-Rahman El-Shaf'i in 1986, and re-adapted once more by Farag in his *Atwa Abu Matwa* (Atwa the Jack-Knife, in 1995) but in a multitude of plays, including a provincial production of *He Who Says No* and *Who Says Yes* (directed by Hossam Atta for the Children's Theatre in Assyout), and, more recently in Hani Ghanem's controversial production of *The Seven Deadly Sins*, at the House of Zeinab Khatoon in 1997.

One has to admit, however, that Brecht in Egypt has been adapted out of recognition. What Egyptians have consciously or unconsciously chosen to forget was his insistence that moral values are historically determined. In a deeply religious country, with a deeply-seated hang-up about absolutes, it was, perhaps, inevitable. Rather than using humour, song and dance, and ham acting to provoke a mood of criticism and inquiry in the audience, a plethora of provincial productions reduced Brecht to an Islamic Communist propagandist. More importantly, his great talent as a poet is, almost always, nearly forgotten.

Several original posters from performances of Brecht's plays are on show at the Goethe Institute. For full details see Listings



But is it art? This is the question that was on everybody's lips in the early days of photography. The same question was raised recently when the Victoria and Albert Museum opened its new Canon Photography Gallery, showing work by conceptual artists as well as prints by artist-photographers and photo-journalists. Many voices were raised criticising the museum for its decision to open the new gallery.

As Richard Dorment writes in the *Daily Telegraph*: "The idea that photography can be one of the fine arts still meets a puzzled resistance, particularly among the generation that, like mine, grew up defining an art museum as a place that showed painting and sculpture." It seems that I also belong to that generation, not that I am opposed to photography as such, but I cannot imagine it being put on a par with the fine arts.

There is no doubt that during the last two decades photography has developed out of all recognition. All kinds of tricks are played with the camera and we find that some painters use it in their work. A gallery, like the Tate, for instance, has shown the works of avowed fine artists who happen to use photography. I remember one of the Italian biennials having a section for photography and computer graphics.

What gives the discussion a special angle in England is that the prestigious Turner prize was given to two artists who worked primarily with photography. This honor seems to answer the question raised at the beginning of this column. Photography has been recognised as high art.

Of course there have been some side effects of the results of the Turner prize and some wild statements have been made by one of the winners. Interviewed after she won the prize in 1997, she said: "Since photography came in, figurative painters have been in decline. I don't wish these people any ill, but they are on to a losing battle if they think contemporary art is going to end because of all the furor." The comment of a critic to that statement was: "Ludicrous."

Right from the introduction of photography painters have taken an antagonistic stand against that invention. Throughout the 20th century artists have consistently taken up arms against photography. As Dorment puts it: "From Gaugin to Jackson Pollock painters progressively discarded those things that photography could do more easily and more accurately: narrative content, spatial illusion and representation itself." There is no doubt that painting has a different job to photography, which is to "cover the flat surface of a canvas with pigment."

Eventually the antagonism between the two worlds — that of fine art and photography — began to converge in the 1970s. Warhol led the way with his photo-based silk screens. Following that the term "New Art" was concocted to describe an exhibition that was organised in London in 1972 at the Hayward Gallery. As one critic put it: "To over simplify, photography became a fine art by sneaking through the back door of conceptual art. The moment when artists began to think of the photograph as a means of expression, not an end in itself, the portals of the Tate Gallery swung open."

While the late 1970s witnessed the beginning of an acceptance of photography as a fine art, it was not until the 1990s when the recognition widened. This was reflected in the number of exhibitions organised both in England and America. The Whitechapel Gallery had such an exhibition in 1996, comprising photographs of still lifes and landscape studies which, according to a critic, "can be enjoyed for the perfection of the lighting, colour and composition."

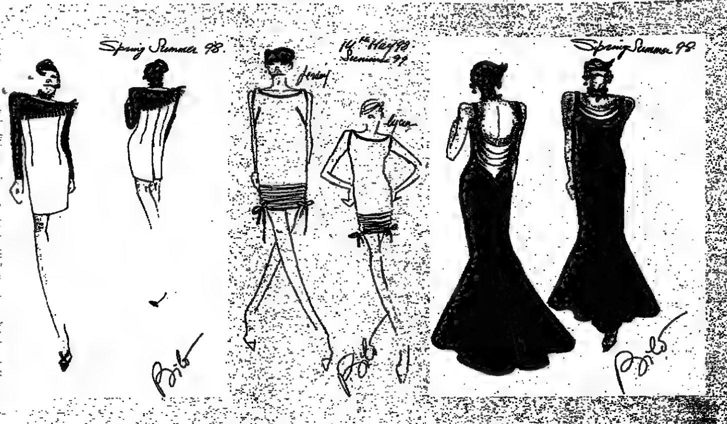
The same critic described the technique of a photographer/artist as that "of an academic artist preparing the vast canvas for his studio."

Such a technique can produce works similar to painting, not only as an expression of reality, but even as abstract or surrealist. Seeing some of the photographs exhibited, with superimposition and collage, one cannot but agree that camera work has come to be looked upon as a fine art.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Dancing chic to chic

Clothing designer Nabil Jamal tells **Fayza Hassan** about Aunt Tabita and Yves St Laurent



His family was Palestinian, but he was born in Egypt and grew up in Ismailia, in a villa built by his father for his mother out of freestones imported from Jerusalem. "There was not a single brick in the foundations of the house," says Nabil (Bilo) Jamal: "only these large stones, from my parents' native land." The house had a huge park, and later, his father had a gas-proof padded war shelter added. "We often had over 35 people spending the night in this shelter during the worse bombing raids."

In the summer of 1940, while Nabil was visiting his aunt Wadi'a in Cairo, his father called his sister, asking her to keep her nephew a little longer: Nabil's mother could no longer stand the stress of the nightly raids, and the family was moving to Cairo at once. Nabil's father's family owned extensive properties in Talbiya, the most exclusive part of Jerusalem. Before 1948, he had often been urged by his wife to sell his share and move to Monte Carlo, but he had always refused to part with his birthright. For years he commuted between Cairo where he and his brothers had established a large travel agency, Ismailia, where his family resided and Jerusalem, where he owned a choice piece of real estate. His brothers, however, would go back to Jerusalem every spring, only returning at the beginning of winter, leaving the Cairo travel agency in the sole care of Nabil's father during the summer months.

"Before 1948," recounts Nabil, "Aba Eban called on my uncle Shibli and asked him to find a job for a poor woman who had come from the United States to settle permanently in Palestine. The woman, he told my uncle, would accept any position just to make a living. Her name was Golda Meir." This was long before the European Jews started settling in Palestine, says Nabil; when they came, they brought with them feelings of animosity previously unknown between Palestinians and Jews who, until then, had never had any cause for quarrel. In 1948, however, the whole family escaped from Jerusalem, taking with them only the titles to their properties in Palestine, which were passed from one member of the family to the other in order of precedence. The last family member to hold the deeds was a Russian aunt, Tabita von Ustinov, who had married Nabil's uncle Anis. Incidentally, she was also Peter Ustinov's aunt. Nabil knows that his father's and uncles' houses are at present occupied by Israelis.

A product of the British school system, unlike most of his more sports-mad classmates, Nabil displayed a decisive artistic bent and, early on, was drawn to fashion design, which in itself was rather surprising. He was not following a family tradition, nor did he find a particularly propitious climate in Egypt, where famous couturiers and creators of original designs were few and far between. He nevertheless started his career in Cairo at La Grande Demoiselle, an exclusive boutique on Qasr Al-Nil Street, where he designed a ready-to-wear line. In the early '60s, he decided to try his luck in Europe. He moved to Paris where, in 1965, he began working free lance for Chloé and Yves St Laurent designing sportswear — blouses and separates — and daytime into evening wear. He was then hired by Rodier, where from 1966 to 1975 he created knit sportswear and early evening dresses.

Nabil kept moving on, acquiring more experience in various fields until he eventually settled in New York, where he designed knitwear for various famous houses. Recently, however, feelings of alienation began to creep up. Memories of Egypt came back in gusts to haunt him. Every time an Egyptian friend came to visit, his depression deepened. He felt he just had to come back. "When we are young, our career is the only thing that counts," he says. " We have no time or patience for nostalgia, but as we grow older, voices from the past start speaking more loudly. I wanted to feel at home once more."



Pot Pourri

Less than ketchup

Driving down the Maadi corniche last week, my daughter suddenly cried out. The exclamation was exactly the same as those she utters when she sees a wounded or dead animal on the road. I looked around hurriedly, but saw no bits of hair and blood splattered on the asphalt. Nor did I see a ball of fur desperately trying to crawl to safety, which would have caused us to grind to an abrupt halt, risking death but disregarding the peril, then — having retrieved the hapless creature — sent us racing to the vet on a rescue mission.

Speechless, her eyes the size of saucers, one hand covering her mouth, my daughter was pointing with the other towards the banks of the river, where a few workers were seemingly in the process of putting the final touches to the new bridge which will link the Maadi Corniche to Munib. Finally I managed to focus on the cause of her agitation: A good dozen fully grown poincianas, still in full bloom, and a couple of majestic sycamores, had been savagely felled, and were lying on the roadside, extending their torn roots towards the motorists. I felt a lump in my throat. I had grasped the reason for the massacre at once. The trees had been sacrificed to the additional lane which would eventually service the new bridge. Somehow, however, I could not believe that there had been no better way to enlarge the road. "Isn't there a way to save them, to re-plant them somewhere else?" whispered my daughter, already knowing the answer to her question.

The bridge had been slowly growing over the past months and we had watched with interest as it stretched out across the Nile. We often joked about its unsightliness, or the strange, convoluted way in which it wound around the buildings, which are already quite an eyesore in their own right. We had even laughed at the amusing stories of people hastening to build shacks on their land if their plot fell in the bridge's inexorable path, in order to get a heftier indemnity when expropriated. We had never feared for the trees, though. They had edged the Corniche for as long as we could remember. They were such a part of the landscape, their flame-like blooms making the surrounding disfigurement caused by the rows of monstrous obstructions almost bearable. The previous day, we had looked at them as we always did, completely unaware that we were seeing them for the last time. Sometimes we take leave of friends with a casual goodbye, secure in the belief that we will see them again before long, and then hear that they died soon after we parted. We reproach ourselves for our lack of foresight, because we failed to sense the solemnity of the moment and did not charge our last words with a special message. Why did I not stop yesterday, I wondered, to look long and hard at the worthy warriors who staunchly stood guard on the Nile banks for so many years, braving the noxious fumes of the traffic, defying the poisonous emissions with their insolent red flowers? I had often shrugged off on-coming pangs of pollution-panic by reasoning that, if the trees had managed to survive so long, then so would we. And now they were gone, destroyed, albeit in a different, more violent way, by the relentless flow of vehicles.

Suddenly, I heard myself giggling nervously. I had just remembered reading recently that on some highway near Collinsville, Illinois, preservationists had formed The Ketchup Bottle Preservation Group, gathering every Saturday for more than a year, in subfreezing or sweltering temperatures alike, beneath a water tower disguised as a giant ketchup bottle, to sell T-shirts to passing motorists, in order to raise the amount needed to restore the monstrous advertisement, erected in 1949, to its original tomato-coloured hue. Would anyone have been willing to do the same on the Maadi Corniche in order to save the poincianas' beautiful red blooms?

Fayza Hassan

Pigeon coop extraordinaire

A mysterious, luxuriously built pigeon coop has recently appeared on the terrace of the Alexandria main branch of the *Ministry* of Health, writes Essam Ali Rifaat. **The pigeons who occupy this informal settlement are following the employees' schedule, albeit in reverse, flying away when they arrive in the morning and returning as soon as they leave. There is, however, concern about the younger birds, who seem to be left unattended during the day. It is rumoured that the search for a competent pigeon sitter is underway, as the employees seem *bent on providing* the birds with all the amenities.**



photo: Hussein Fathi

Sufra Dayma

No-bake chocolate cake

Ingredients:
50 gms. butter
125 gms. plain chocolate (chopped)
125 gms. *petit beurre* biscuits (crumbled)
2 tbsp. golden syrup
25 gms. preserved dates (chopped)
25 gms. glazed cherries (chopped)
1/2 orange

Method:
Melt the butter and chocolate in a saucepan with the syrup. Stir in the biscuits, cherries and dates. Spoon into a greased, shallow 15 square cm cake tin. Smooth top with a spatula. Press down firmly using the cut side of the orange. Leave to set until it reaches room temperature. Refrigerate for one hour. Cut into squares and leave to retain room temperature once more. Serve as a snack, at tea-time or at breakfast.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

The great outdoors

Andrew Steele goes rambling

The vastness of the whole affair is what strikes one first about the Food Market at the *Swissôtel Al-Salaam's Summer Terrace*. Three separate dining niches, each with a capacity for well over fifty hungry horses, span the semi-circular space. A stage promising exotic entertainment is the centrepiece, open buffets from around the world adorn the edges. It was a warm and balmy evening when we chose to visit. Mosquito coils were strategically positioned to keep the insect life at bay. Marble and alabaster are the claddings of choice here, all rather gleaming and grandiose, but sadly, rather empty. Perhaps 8.30 is a trifle early for the Heliopolitan smart set: perhaps 8.30 is a time to be poring over mirrors or extracting heated rollers ready for the Thursday night frolic. Whatever the reason, *the Chic Ones were conspicuous in their absence*. Food, on the other hand, could be found in glittery five-star over-abundance. The victuals hail from four broad destinations: Asia, The Far East, The Middle East, and one that was too far away from our table to be able to see properly. The thought of such a rigorous constitutional was not popular, and my companions, being incurious, declined the stroll. Salad and pudding bars adorned the edges of the space; these also seemed to have acquired their wares from the land of plenty.

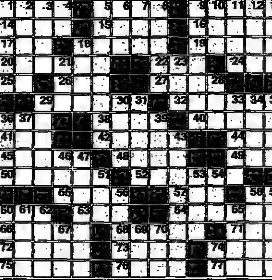
So, choices and verdicts? Let us begin with *the salads; these were no better nor worse than* any of their contemporaries at similar five star outlets. The *tabboula* was particularly titillating and the selection of other equally green and crunchy things multifarious. Jo commented on the creamy gorgeousness of the *tahina*, an opinion backed up by her diminutive son. This is a fine venue to take a child to, by the way: *such is its size, you'll have* no trouble losing said sprog with minimal difficulty. For main courses we decided to go Asian; not simply because the variety of fare seemed perhaps the most authentic, but for the presence of a jolly Thai chef, who had an air of knowing what he was doing. He also had the measure of Jo's son, who demanded fried shrimps most vociferously; fried shrimps were forthcoming. The other buffet items were surprisingly good: I'm not a lover of the buffet — tepid, congealed and mass-produced are the first adjectives that spring to mind but those good people at Swissôtel seem to have taken this in hand. The shrimp fried rice was light, fluffy and infused with Thai herbs, a fine accompaniment to the tender sweet and sour chicken. The beef sate and shrimp toasts were similarly good and the assorted tempura crisp and tasty. A large plate can be piled high, and topped up as many times as you please. Such was our gluttony, we had no room for pudding, which was just as well considering the amount of cream and chocolate on display. As we ruminated on the Swissôtel buffet experience, a feisty lounge singer treated us to the strains of Latino love songs and we drifted, sated and sleepy, into the summer night. A very good buffet, as far as buffets go, at the Al-Salaam. Our bill, with two Stellas and an orange juice, came to just over LE200. We declined the offer of a doggy bag.

The Food Market at Swissôtel Al-Salaam
Abdel-Hamid Badawi Street, Heliopolis
Tel: 2974000

Al-Ahram Weekly

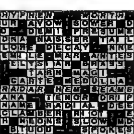
Crossword

By Samia Abdennour



ACROSS
1. Whippersnapper, urchin (4)
5. God of love (4)
9. Droll (5)
14. Grass plot (4)
15. Macadamise (4)
16. Pretentious mimicry (5)
17. Times past (3)
18. Indian musical instrument (5)
19. Jeans material (5)
20. Reminders of times past (6)
22. Through (3)
24. Manipulate; make do with (3)
25. Actor Sullivan (2)
26. Its stem is used as musical pipe by shepherds (3)
27. Covetousness (4)
29. Nationwide; not exclusive (6)
32. Spur; tailor's necessity (6)
34. Lincoln's pet name (3)
38. Make-up case (4)
40. More unusual (5)
41. Neither's partner (3)
42. Some Yugoslav natives (5)
44. Printing measure, pl. (3)
45. Sept; race (5)
48. Demeanour, countenance (4)
49. Dined (3)
50. Upriver, backwoods (6)
52. Outlawed; expatriated (6)
55. Outline; come near; deduce; extract (4)
57. Cosmetic substance for setting hair (3)
58. Atop (2)
60. Initials of a US media broadcaster (3)
63. Hurry-scurry (3)
64. The twins: Castor and Pollux (6)
66. By the side of; in company with (5)
68. Stream (5)
71. Uproar (3)
72. Recipient (6)
73. Nova (4)
74. Mechanical repetition (4)
75. Fast powerful horse (5)
76. Weather directions (4)
77. Pub quaffs (4)

DOWN
1. Trumpet sound (5)
2. Bellowed (5)
3. Absent without leave, abb. (4)
4. Symbol for "thoron" (2)
5. Lengthy serious letters (8)
6. Deserter, stool pigeon (3)
7. Eggs (3)
8. Tennis ace (5)
9. Corpse (7)
10. Poetic for unclose
11. Bill of fare (4)
12. Goddess of the rainbow (4)
13. Flat-topped flower cluster, inflorescence (4)
18. Person who tries to break strike; crust over would (4)
21. Promissory note (4)
23. Hostel (3)
28. Affirmative vote (3)
29. Hazard; jeopardy (4)
30. Entry; detail; innuendo (4)
31. Radium discoverer (5)
33. Fright (5)
34. Advanced (4)
35. Gaelic language (4)
36. Opposite (4)
37. Begotten (4)
39. Mountain wild goat; chamois (4)
43. Half suppressed secretive laughs (8)
46. Horrid (3)
47. Incensed (7)
51. Father (3)
53. Look out of the corner of one's eye (4)
54. Shade tree (3)
56. Comparative of 46 Down (4)
58. Join (5)
59. Yearns for (5)
60. Dishonourable persons (4)
61. Stain (4)
62. Unit of loudness (4)
65. Thing of worship (4)
67. Born (3)
69. Pronoun (3)
70. Trailer, camper (3)
74. Sun God (2)



Last week's solution

or E-mail fasie@hotmail.com

prehensive peace "the enemies of peace".

هكذا من الأصل

Book review:

Tale of an ancient mariner

The Shipwrecked Sailor

A Tale from Ancient Egypt

The Shipwrecked Sailor: A Tale from Ancient Egypt, translation and hieroglyphs by John L Foster, illustrations by Lyla Pinch Brock. The American University in Cairo Press, Cairo, 1998. LE25

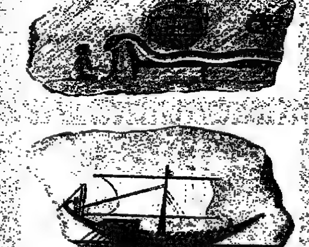
This is one of the most delightful and original books on the market. It is a serious study for children; a children's story for adults. It is, to quote from the "blurb" on the back cover: a sailor's yarn from the twentieth century BC, a tall tale of shipwreck and survival, an enchanted isle and a lordly talking serpent with his own tragic tale to tell.

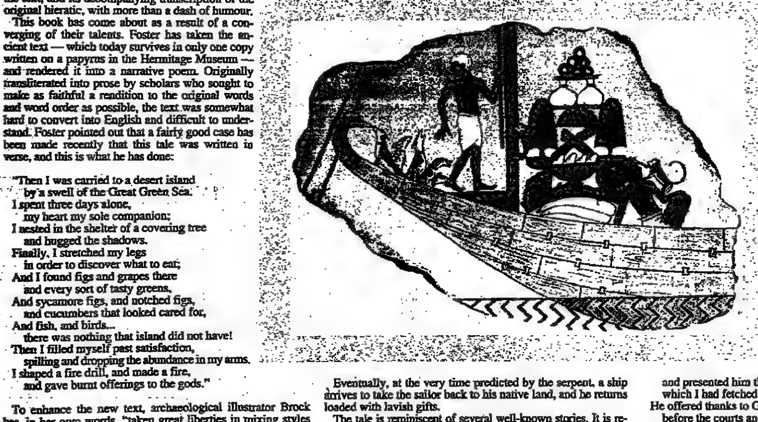
It is an amusing tale of wonder, magic and the supernatural; an adventure in a faraway land. Two professionals have given this Ancient Egyptian fairy tale a new dimension. Professor John L Foster, who earned a doctorate in English and American literature, became interested in the language and literature of Ancient Egypt. He has published several books of translations, including *Love Songs of the New Kingdom*, and has retold this ancient folk tale in modern, engaging style. Lyla Pinch Brock, archaeologist, epigrapher, and specialist in historical reconstruction, has enhanced the text, and its accompanying transcription of the original hieratic, with more than a dash of humour.

This book has come about as a result of a converging of their talents. Foster has taken the ancient text — which today survives in only one copy written on a papyrus in the Hermitage Museum — and rendered it into a narrative poem. Originally transliterated into prose by scholars who sought to make as faithful a rendition to the original words and word order as possible, the text was somewhat hard to convert into English and difficult to understand. Foster pointed out that a fairly good case has been made recently that this tale was written in verse, and this is what he has done:

"Then I was carried to a desert island
  by a swell of the Great Green Sea.
I spent three days alone,
  my heart my sole companion;
I nested in the shelter of a covering tree
  and hugged the shadows.
Finally, I stretched my legs
  in order to discover what to eat;
And I found figs and grapes there
  and every sort of tasty greens,
And sycamore figs, and notched figs,
  and cucumbers that looked cared for,
And fish, and birds...
  there was nothing that island did not have!
Then I filled myself past satisfaction,
  spilling and dropping the abundance in my arms.
I shaped a fire drill, and made a fire,
  and gave burnt offerings to the gods."











To enhance the new text, archaeological illustrator Brock has, in her own words, "taken great liberties in mixing styles and periods. The face of the sailor is borrowed from a painted fragment of unknown provenance in the *Egyptian Museum* in Berlin. The scene of the magic isle is the well-known Punt relief from the Temple of Hatshepsut at Deir El-Bahari. I based the map of the mines on photographs of the original in the Turin Museum, but as for the serpent, you will find him only here. I tried to make our snake a sympathetic character."

And, indeed, she has. His eyebrows of lapis lazuli, his flesh of gilt, and a beard that hung down by a yard (as described in the poem), has made him a most appealing creature. He lies on a chaise-longue, with an Egyptian headrest to support his mighty tail, a crown with three sacred cobras and a peg on which to hang his shed skin at night! Never has there been a more delightful serpent, who sheds tears when he recalls the death of his young daughter.

Eventually, at the very time predicted by the serpent, a ship arrives to take the sailor back to his native land, and he returns loaded with lavish gifts.

The tale is reminiscent of several well-known stories. It is related to those of Prince Seyn Alasnam in the *Thousand and One Nights*, to the episode of the arrival of Odysseus among the Phaeacians in the *Odyssey*, and, of course, to Sindbad the Sailor. It is an archaic example of an adventure at sea, and although the text dates back to around the 19th century BC, it reproduces a more ancient text, which, in turn, goes back to an oral tradition. The narrator addresses himself to a prince with whom he is returning to Egypt. The prince is apprehensive about the welcome the king has in store for him, hence, to give him courage, the shipwrecked sailor relates his experience; its tragic beginning, and happy ending with the pharaoh's congratulations.

"And we arrived home after two months,
  just as he had said.
Then I entered to my Sovereign
  and presented him these gifts
  which I had fetched him from the island.
He offered thanks to God for my existence
  before the courts and councils of the Land;
And I was made a royal Follower
  and given two hundred servants.
Just look at me, once I touched land!
  and after seeing all that I had seen!"

"The final scene is without exact parallels," said Brock, "but the mirror, collar, and clothing are depicted as equipment for the afterlife of Rekhmire on the Theban necropolis, and I painted the king with the craggy features of Senwosret III."

Don't miss this book. It's for the young and the young at heart, but it is also for students of Egyptology who would seek clues in the stages of translation, approximate pronunciation and transliteration of the texts.

Reviewed by ***Jill Kamil***

Dahshur changed forever

The tomb of the high priest of the goddess Neith was discovered last week in Dahshur, south of Saqqara. **Nevine El-Aref** visited the tomb

After two years of excavations, a Japanese team from Waseda University has unearthed the tomb of Ptahemwia, the high priest of Neith's temple north of Dahshur. It is a mud brick construction with an approach leading to two courts and a chapel with side chambers.

The tomb dates back to the late 18th Dynasty. Objects were found in the main shaft which is about 13 metres deep and leads to four chambers previously disturbed by robbers. Some are seals in the shape of scarabs with the names Tutankhamun and Ramsis II inscribed on them.

"Most of the objects were found in the shafts of the second court: fragments of canopic jars, *shwabti* figures and ornamental objects indicate that they originated from the burial chambers," said Sakuji Yoshimura, the team's director. "Some seem to have been burned when the tomb was vandalised; objects were carbonised."





(l-r) A bird's eye view of the shaft and some of the jewellery discovered; photos courtesy of Waseda University

Among the objects discovered were relief blocks decorated in the style of Amarna which, Yoshimura said, showed high-ranking officials or priests in front of a pylon. The subject appears to be a funerary procession and each official wears an elaborate wig. The long hair and kilts are finely executed.

Yoshimura pointed to a fighting scene represented in two registers. The legs of animals on its upper part and barbarians on the lower can be seen.

A limestone stela 120 by 70 centimetres has been reconstructed. The upper part has a cornice and the central scene is divided into two registers. The upper one shows a sacrificial scene to Osiris, the lower an offering to the parents of Ptahemwia, his wife Nait, and their sons.

A collection of rings was also found. Two of them are faience and are inscribed with the name Ankhsenamen and have the *Ujat* eye. There was a small bronze ring with coils and a faience finger ring with lotus design. "Lotus-style ornamentation was popular in the Amarna period and under Tutankhamun," Yoshimura said.

Among other objects unearthed was a group of canopic jar lids made of alabaster, *shwepte* fragments and pottery shards painted blue on a cream background with floral design. "The use of red and black lines are typical of the late 18th Dynasty, familiar to us from examples of the Malqata Palace in Luxor and Amarna," said Yoshimura.

"This is an important discovery which will change the history of the Dahshur area," said Zahi Hawass, director-general of the Giza Plateau. Hawass said that the Giza Necropolis, which extends from Abu Rawash north of Giza to Meidum in the south, contains mostly cemeteries of the Old and Middle Kingdoms. "But after this new discovery the theory will change and further excavations will undoubtedly reveal monuments of the New Kingdom," Hawass said.

The Japanese mission is restoring the tomb, conserving each object found, and has constructed a wooden ladder leading to the shaft. They are also continuing studies on the site.

"The tomb is closed to the public until complete restoration is completed and the intact sarcophagus opened," said Gaballa Gaballa, secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities.

Site tours

Sunny summer deals

Summer has begun and most hotels and resorts are offering lucrative prices and packages for the holiday makers. The following prices are for Egyptians and foreign residents only.

Hotels

Sharm El-Sheikh:
Baron Sharm El-Sheikh offers double rooms for LE 90 per person with a garden view, and double rooms for LE115 per person in a double room sea view. The price includes buffet breakfast, taxes and service. Valid until the end of July.
Pyramisa Sharm El-Sheikh offers double rooms for LE115 per person including buffet breakfast. The offer is valid until mid-July.

Aswan:
Pyramisa Aswan offers double rooms for LE80 per person including breakfast. Offer is valid until mid July.

Luxor:
Pyramisa Luxor offers double rooms for LE70 per person including breakfast. Offer is valid until mid July.

Hurghada:
Magawish tourist village offers a 4 day stay in the village for LE505

Cairo:
Forte Grand Pyramids offers double rooms for LE130 per person inclusive of lunch only, service charge and taxes.
Oasis hotel offers double rooms for LE49 per person including open buffet breakfast and exclusive of taxes and services. Offer is valid until the end of June.

Pyramisa Cairo offers double rooms for LE125 per person including breakfast. Offer is valid until mid July.
Semiramis Intercontinental offers single rooms for LE200 and double rooms for LE240. The offer includes service charge, taxes and American buffet breakfast. Offer is valid until the end of July.

Travel agencies

Regina Maris boat plans a trip to Suez, Aqaba, Eilat, Sharm El-Sheikh, Safaga and Suez. Double cabins are for LE1360 per person.
Maya Travel offers trips to Paris, Istanbul, Rhodes and Beirut. Prices are LE2650, LE1355, LE1140 and LE1490 respectively. Each trip will last for a week.
South Sinai Travel organises trips to Istanbul, Beirut and Paris for LE 1090, LE1400 and LE2275. Prices include accomodation, transportation and air-tickets.

Compiled by ***Rehab Saad***

Pills and thrills

Investigations following the official ban on Viagra have revealed that unsuspected quantities of smuggled or counterfeit pharmaceuticals, some past their expiry date, others ineffective or downright dangerous, are available to the public. Gihan Shahine takes a look at the government's recent efforts to get a grip

Ahmed recently took a herbal treatment for *vitiligo (a skin disease). It alleviated* the symptoms; but now he is suffering from severe migraines and muscle cramping.

Zeinab has been using an ointment claimed to cure obesity. The ointment, she was told, should be spread all over the body in order to dissolve fat effectively. Zeinab has not lost any weight, but she has suffered heart palpitations ever since she applied the ointment, which made her perspire profusely.

A 35-year-old accountant has been applying a cure for baldness for six months now, but to no avail.

Where do they buy the drugs? Ironically, pharmacies are no longer the only source of pharmaceuticals in Egypt. Many supermarkets, body-care shops, beauty centres *and even street vendors sell potions,* herbal remedies or cure-alls — and the public is buying them enthusiastically.

One section of a fashionable leather shop in Giza is devoted to herbal products *claimed to induce weight loss, reverse* balding, cure acne, and lighten the skin. A packet of powder costs LE15 to LE20, and a course of at least six months is necessary for "good results", the vendor claims.

Back *on the streets, however,* a *larger* array of herbal treatments is sold by street vendors for much cheaper prices. A downtown street vendor proudly presents his "magic collection" of herbs "treating everything from minor physical ailments like headaches, stomach-ache, constipation, diarrhoea, to chronic diseases like diabetes, heart problems, insomnia and impotence," he says. He refuses, however, to give information about the ingredients of any of the herbal packages. "The secrets of the trade, you know," he whispers with a wink.

Beauty centres also distribute unlicensed herbs. At a beauty centre in Zamalek, which recently resumed business after being officially ordered to close several times, the manager, who is not a doctor but is called so by his subordinates, explains that his herbal preparations have proved successful in treating obesity, thinness and skin diseases. He claims that the herbs he is using are not registered at the Ministry of Health for "bureaucratic reasons".

"I collect the herbs from Sinai, they are all natural and, even if not useful in some cases, they are never harmful," he says. "Natural products are never harmful."

But even "natural products" can be unhealthy if not used under medical supervision and according to a certain dose, warns Gamal Abul-Gheit, a pharmacist. "Herbal remedies may be successful in treating a *certain disease, but may* also cause other health complications," Abul-Gheit explains. "All medications may contain a percentage of toxic material and should thus be subject to analysis and taken under medical supervision. Remedies bought on the street are particularly dangerous, since they are probably contaminated by pollution. The Ministry of Health should take steps to protect consumers," he asserts.

Neither the Ministry of Health nor the Pharmacists' Syndicate have legal authority over street vendors, even those selling medical *preparations. According to Dr Shawqi* Abu Qoura, the chairman of the pharmacy investigations department at the *Ministry of Health,* however, the ministry sometimes cooperates with the police and the supply investigations department to arrest street vendors who sell herbs and other remedies.

"Arresting them is not easy, for street vendors have their own way of evading police raids," Abu Qoura says. "But the raids are very effective sometimes. Last time we found street vendors selling contaminated herbs, but also laboratories making counterfeit drugs."

Pharmacies, indeed, are the government's current concern, since several recent raids have revealed the existence of a thriving black market. During *recent raids by officials seeking to confiscate* supplies of the now illegal Viagra, 42 brands of contraband medication were found in three pharmacies in Nasr City and downtown. In Port Said, 14 additional brands and 3,212 *packages of uncertified* drugs were found in the home of a pharmacist and in a pharmacy. Last week, two pharmacy owners were arrested for selling unlicensed and potentially hazardous herbal preparations, according to Abu Qoura.

Even before the campaign against Viagra, several pharmacies were found to be selling medications illegally. "In one raid, we collected 18 truck-loads of smuggled pharmaceuticals," Abu Qoura notes.

According to informal estimates, Egypt consumes three billion pounds' worth of pharmaceuticals, and about 40 tons of medicine are smuggled into the country, every year. Despite the ministry's periodical checks, many physicians and pharmacists assert that only 10 per cent of such illegally imported drugs are actually confiscated.

"Our pharmacy usually receives several offers of medical and cosmetic products smuggled in from Arab countries and the Far East, but I definitely refuse to sell such products," says Abul-Gheit. "Some pharmacists may accept to sell such items because they are difficult to find and their price is not set by the government, so the trade can be very profitable."

But the restrictions imposed on the registration of medicine in Egypt are sometimes seen as one reason why many unlicensed drugs are smuggled into the country. "Many physicians attend conferences abroad and *prescribe foreign* brands which are not available here. When patients do not find the drugs, they resort to illegal means of obtaining them," explains one pharmacist. But the smugglers, he adds, are *not pharmacists* themselves. "They are probably people who travel abroad and have access to pharmacists who want to make quick profit."

Due to restrictions on the registration of new medications, therefore, the black market may in fact fill an important gap. Abu Qoura maintains that about 37 medications are needed urgently, but have not been registered in Egypt yet. "It would be better in this case to register the drug, to make it *available and fix its price,*" he says.

Safety guarantees are also an important factor: imported medications are usually subject to strict storage conditions to guarantee their safety and effectiveness, conditions *which are probably absent in the case* of smuggled drugs. "The smugglers usually bring medicine in suitcases, which may be exposed to heat or bad storage conditions," Abu Qoura explains. "Again, since the traders are usually not members of the medical profession, they could be bringing in drugs past their expiry date without even realising it. This is why we get rid of all confiscated drugs instead of keeping them for state hospitals to use."

It takes at least two years for a new medication to be analysed and the relevant experiments carried out. In some cases, however, when the medicine is universally acknowledged as safe and has been tested by the US Food and Drug Administration, the process takes only a couple of months. The law also stipulates that drugs for which locally produced alternatives are available should not be registered at all.

"The registration of drugs is not restricted, merely organised," explains Zakariya Gad, the chairman of the Pharmacists' Syndicate. "This process prevents the inundation of the market with several different brands of the same drug, and also allows us to avoid bringing in drugs for which there are local alternatives. Doctors should cooperate with the ministry, informing it of drugs which need to be registered, rather than confusing patients by prescribing unavailable medications."

But patients are already confused by the number of advertisements promoting steroids, male-potency drugs and cosmetics. Many of these are unlicensed, and could have very *dangerous side effects.*

"The advertisers are aware of people's psychology, and have thus played on two points: beauty and sex," explains Dr Amal Abdel-Hamid, a professor of plastic surgery at Cairo University. "Most of the advertised cosmetics are not scientifically recognised and may have serious side effects. Breast augmentation and weight reduction ointments, as well as medicines to treat baldness, are significant examples of the many *ineffective, unlicensed cosmetics* which are illegally advertised and sold over the counter in pharmacies. Advertisements for medicine should be banned, or at least strictly supervised by the Ministry of Health."

The *Viagra adventure revealed that* male potency drugs top the black market in terms of quantity available and consumption. Gynaecologist Mohamed Fayad, head of the Egyptian Sterility Treatment Association, warns: "Due to misleading advertisements, there has been an upsurge in the use of vitamins and male potency drugs. Such drugs, however, may be dangerous if not taken under strict medical supervision, as is the case with Viagra."

The controversy over Viagra has also brought the pharmaceutical industry as a whole into the limelight. One issue raised has been the frequent absence of licensed medical personnel in pharmacies, which are sometimes illegally run by non-professionals. Unlicensed salespeople often recommend medications to customers.

"More important, however, is the issue of easy access," maintains Mounir El-Kerdani, the chairman of a pharmaceutical company. "It is one aspect of the general chaos prevailing. In developed countries, a patient must present a prescription when buying any medicine. This is not the case here."

But the government has recently been exerting efforts to place the drug market under stricter control. According to Gamila Moussa, under-secretary for pharmaceuticals at the Ministry of Health, "more checks on pharmacies are being carried out, and incidents of smuggling are decreasing significantly."

In response to directives issued by the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Trade and Supply is imposing tighter security measures on Egyptian ports in an effort to *combat the illegal entry of unlicensed* medicine in general, and Viagra in particular. Any suspected medical products are immediately sent for analysis, and convicted smugglers are subject to punitive measures.

Penalties, however, are a bone of contention among members of the parliamentary health committee recently convened to discuss amendments to the law on pharmaceuticals.



Potions and lotions to restore fading youth, replenish thinning hair and revive that zest for life: sidewalk venders, like upscale pharmacies, cater to the twin obsessions, sex and beauty

Patients or guinea pigs?

Claims that Egyptians may unwittingly be serving as human guinea pigs in a clinical trial have been raising people's blood pressure. Mariz Tadros investigates

The National Heart Institute (NHI) in Imbaba has long been eager to buy a laser machine, but could never afford the expense. Then, last month, Duke University in North Carolina donated just such a machine to the Ministry of Health, which turned it over to the NHI.

So far, so good — until doctors at the institute began to realise that there were strings attached, *in the form of a protocol* between Duke University and the NHI stipulating that 100 Egyptian patients would take part in a clinical study. Meanwhile, for unknown reasons, the machine was moved from the institute to another hospital, the Nasser Institute on the corniche near Shubra.

During a recent parliamentary debate, Health Minister Ismail Sallam, himself a heart surgeon, came under fire from MP Abdel-Moneim Samak for allowing doctors to proceed with the laser treatment which, Samak claimed, was banned in the United States. Sallam, though infuriated, shrugged off the criticism.

What triggered the controversy was not the use of laser itself, but its application to patients who can be treated by other methods such as balloon dilation or surgery. An American doctor who brought the *laser machine to the NHI in late April told Al-Ahram Weekly* that if the institute wanted to terminate the protocol, the laser machine would remain a gift to the Egyptian people. The doctor also said that the effects of laser on patients who can be treated by other methods were unknown. This uncertainty has prompted many to wonder whether Egyptian patients were being used as guinea pigs in an American experiment.

Dr Adel Imam, a prominent cardiologist at the institute, is outraged at this suggestion. "We would not approve of anything that could threaten a patient's life. We are talking about patients who, unless treated by laser, would need a heart transplant."

Why then did some doctors oppose the protocol? "Some doctors are just paranoid," he answered. "In the final analysis, this is just an *argument between doctors.*"

Dr Medhat El-Gammal, a renowned heart surgeon, hailed the introduction of the laser treatment. When treatment with traditional methods does not work, the patient's life is left on the line. This is where laser comes in, El-Gammal said, for this new method could drastically *improve* a patient's chances.

El-Gammal added that, contrary to rumours, the institute did not secretly select the patients for the study. He himself was on the committee responsible for their selection, he said, explaining that an advertisement inviting interested patients was posted at the institute. "All the hassle has only confused and frightened patients. The advocates of conventional methods are putting up resistance because laser is a new kind of treatment," he said.

El-Gammal denied that America's Food and Drug Administration (FDA) had not approved the use of laser for patients suffering from moderate cardiac disease, saying that it is now accepted for all patients at all stages of cardiac treatment.

But Dr Taher El-Qadi, another cardiologist, had a different story to tell. Laser has not been approved "yet" by the FDA, he said. Nevertheless, he contended, "We don't have to follow America in everything. The FDA is not the sole yardstick." He added: "With the introduction of any new method of treatment, there are bound to be objections." El-Qadi said that only three doctors opposed the protocol.

However, *Al-Ahram Weekly* found out that there were certainly more than three doctors who have reservations against the use of laser on ethical as well as technical grounds.

One cardiologist, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that he *and his colleagues are not opposed to the introduction of the laser* machine, simply to the conditions attached. He agreed that when balloon dilation and surgery are not possible, laser is the most appropriate method. But it should be used as a last, not a first, resort, he said. "The way Egyptians are being used as guinea pigs by the Americans *is just not acceptable. The whole thing is so unethical.*"

According to this cardiologist, the problem is that laser treatment will thus be given to patients whose condition differs from those for whom the treatment is normally used. "For these cases, the use of laser has never been documented in medical journals," he said. "We *know that laser treatment should not be used as an alternative to* conventional methods. This is a universally accepted principle. But under the protocol, laser would be used on patients in the primary stages of cardiac disease, instead of other methods whose results are known, documented and approved."

Despite his adamant opposition to this "experiment", the cardiologist did not know whether laser would threaten a patient's life. "This is just it, we don't know what to expect because this has not been done before. Why should we experiment with it on Egyptian patients when we don't know what we are getting ourselves into?" he asked.

The cardiologist rejected claims that a parallel experiment is being conducted in the United States. "The Americans would never take such a risk. That's why it is being done here. Even the American doctor who brought the laser machine admitted that patients in these conditions have not undergone such treatment before and that he is unsure what the results will be."

The cardiologist also expressed concern for the 50 patients — the control group — who will be taking medication. He said those patients are supposed to come in for a check-up every three months. "If anything happens suddenly during these three months and we don't have time to intervene, the patient is done for, whereas his chances would have been better had he had undergone surgery or been treated by the balloon dilation method." *What is most perplexing, said the* cardiologist, is that the institute would have got the machine even if it had not signed the protocol. "So why go ahead with this experiment on Egyptians?" The whole process was clearly unethical, he said.

It is estimated that within a few weeks, about 40 patients will have *been subjected to the laser treatment. Some doctors say that evaluations* can be made only after four to six months; others believe that evaluation is possible immediately after the operation. Likewise, some say that similar "clinical studies" have been made before; others insist that this is the first time.

Burn the fat, not yourself

What is the best way to get in bikini shape? Eman Abdel-Moeti sheds a few kilos in Maadi

Choosing the right way to lose or gain weight de*pends on a combination of things, the two most* obvious of which are diet and exercise. But what type of diet, and what kind of exercise?

The research centre at the Olympic Centre in Maadi recently hosted a seminar for health care professionals to discuss this issue, and to provide guidelines for athletes, coaches and anyone else interested in weight control.

Sweating weight off and an *unbalanced diet* are the two most hazardous ways of losing weight. They are also the most commonly used. Since most athletes are conscientious about their weight only for a week prior to each big event, they tend to sweat buckets while depriving themselves of a healthy balanced diet. According to Farouk Abdel-Wahab, PhD in human performance, sweating while exercising and a brutal diet drain the body of its water. People may lose a lot of weight at first, but after a while weight *loss will stabilise. He added: "Dehydration* reduces motor control and thus performance drops off suddenly before any fat is burned."

In return for losing a few pounds in a short time, athletes are thus condemned to underachieve. "Water is very essential for everyone to maintain stable motor control," said Abdel-Wahab, who advises: "The best way to drink is *to sip* the water slowly in order to allow your body to absorb it and use it efficiently."

A diet which depends solely on one of the main food groups can lead to malnutrition, which also reduces the standard of performance. According to Yasser El-Naggar, an acupuncture therapist, certain diets are the result of campaigns for fat-free food products: such puritanism can be very dangerous, because fats are an essential source of energy.

Abdel-Wahab *added that the number of fat* cells in the body does not increase when we increase food consumption: "The number of fat cells is formed during the first five years of our life. After that, the more we eat the more these cells grow in size."

Abul-Ela Abdel-Fattah, head of the sports and health department in the Faculty of Physical Education, Helwan University, said, "Protein, carbohydrates, and sugars are essential for any physical activity; as long as that activity equals *our food intake in calories, our bodies do* not form excess fat."

Explaining further, Essam Noureddin, a biochemist and physician at the Faculty of Medicine, Zaqaziq University, said people are so afraid of eating sugars and carbohydrates that they deprive themselves entirely of these crucial foods. The body starts out with glucose — the product of sugars and carbohydrates — and transforms it into one gramme of calories for eve*ry kilogramme of the body's weight.* When there is no sugar or carbohydrates, the body turns to protein instead. Noureddin and Abdel-Fattah both emphasised the role of protein in fostering muscle development.

Some athletes want to lose weight by burning fat. For them, Abdel-Wahab recommends aerobics, while El-Naggar advises climbing up any*thing from mountains to staircases.*

Others want to gain more weight in the form of muscles, either as an end in itself, or to build up strength. For them, Dr Abdel-Fattah suggests resistance training: "Generally speaking, athletes should increase their carbohydrate and protein intake to form glycogen, which is important for the muscles. To increase muscle size, the resistance training *pattern should focus on lifting the same* amount of weight an indefinite number of times by gradually increasing the number of repeti*tions. But to build power, the training pattern* should focus on increasing the weights with the same number of repetitions every time."

For women, Abdel-Fattah advises the latter type of resistance training, because it combats osteoporosis. He recommends that women eat a balanced diet that includes not only proteins, carbohydrates, fruit and vegetables, but also sugars and fats. Noureddin adds that the best kind of diet for those who want to lose weight is to eat two meals containing all the different food groups, but in limited quantities only, as may be appropriate to their bodies and activities. They should eat absolutely nothing between meals. "After following a diet for a month, patients complain that they are not losing any weight. Then it turns out they have been eating crisps or chocolate in between meals," he explained.

Food and exercise should form a carefully planned routine that is part of everyone's daily life, whether they want to lose or gain weight. Before planning an individual's ideal diet and exercise routine, experts will usually measure body fat and monitor their daily routine for a week, noting food consumption and physical activity. Then, taking into consideration their hereditary *background, metabolism, and eating habits,* a diet and exercise programme will be prescribed. Patients then need to commit to this programme as *an integral part of their lives for an extended* period of time. This procedure, however, applies only to people whose excess weight does not stem from glandular malfunction. Clinical obesity should be treated with biochemical methods, as well as diet and exercise.

Experts also discussed the use of complementary methods of weight control, such as ac*upuncture, herbs, antioxidants* and chromium therapy. Although many of these things can be recommended, experts say they should only ever be used cautiously, especially chromium and natural herbs. El-Naggar noted: "Acupuncture is about measuring and controlling energy changes in the body. It can help redistribute fats, and it balances the metabolism. It can be a useful element in a programme of weight control."

Said El-Hefnawi, professor of medicine at the *Faculty of Pharmacology,* Cairo University, said, "Natural herbs, especially those used for weight control, are extremely dangerous, because most of them are laxatives, and have a bad impact on both the digestive system and the heart."

As for chromium, a recent addition to the weight control arsenal, Noureddin said: "Chromium burns glucose and regulates insulin in the blood. *It exists naturally in the body,* constituting one per cent of total food intake after it has been absorbed. In large quantities, it saturates in the liver, and may cause liver failure."

The experts' main advice is to stay away from passive exercise apparatuses, fat-free food, sweating, bad diets, overtraining to the point of fatigue, and any attempt to lose weight in only a short period of time.

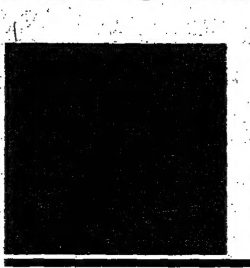
Guidelines for weight control can be followed by healthy people, but a carefully planned diet and exercise routine can only be designed by an expert.

or E-mail fasle@hotmail.com

prehensive peace the enemies of peace".

هكذا من الأصل

Wasteland forsaken



Is there enough water to go around? The question is no longer academic in the village of Zagaluna, where inhabitants cannot get enough irrigation water to meet subsistence needs. **Fatemah Farag** investigates

photos: Sherif Sonbol

Stretched across the valley of Al-Radisiya *Sharq are four villages inhabited by people* who have time and again paid a heavy price for the development of Egypt's water resources. First, they were displaced by the construction of the High Dam, then they were shuffled between various plots of land designated for reclamation but unsuitable for the purpose. Finally, they were brought here — to this arid land which they made home. It is apt perhaps that one of the villages should be called Zagaluna, which, in the local dialect, means: "They pushed us away".

Unfortunately, the history of Zagaluna continues to be tied to that of water policy problems. Although originally moved from Wadi Halfa so that Egypt would have a steady and abundant flow of water, the people of Zagaluna today face starvation and an uncertain future because of serious water shortages.

"The project was prepared in 1966 by the Institution for Rural Development," recounts Alaaeddin Ibrahim Hussein, head of the Irrigation Bureau of Edfu Sharq. "The Nile Water Station built for that purpose was designed to irrigate 10,500 feddans." Accordingly, 4,200 square metres of water were pumped to the Abari Valley and 6,800 to the Radisiya Valley — which services the Radisiya area.

At the time, the amount of water seemed adequate. "We were moved here in the early '70s. It was difficult, but eventually we made the land cultivable. We grew everything — oranges, wheat, barley, vegetables," said Mohamed Ahmed Hussein, one of the village elders. Today, life is quite different. "Everything is turning into desert... I remember that the road I used to take to school was lined with trees. Not anymore," says Nagwa Fouad, a young woman *brought* up in the village. Fawziya, a mother of seven, complains bitterly: "I just about get enough flour to make bread. I can no longer offer my family anything to go with it."

Today, all the men of the village keep plastic *bags in* their pockets, which they carefully unroll for anyone who will take the time to listen to their story. The bags *hold dozens of* complaints submitted at various times to a host of government departments. "This is the *tenth* year that we have been unable to make a decent living," explains Abdel-Azim Mahmoud. "We used to harvest two crops a year. Then we could only collect the winter harvest and, for three years now, neither has been possible."

Regional irrigation officer Hussein explains that the irrigation *quotas* established in the early '60s were calculated *on the* basis that only crops requiring 40 cubic metres of water per day per feddan would be planted. "People were only supposed to grow traditional crops like wheat and citrus fruits. They started to grow sugar cane, *which* requires 120 metres of water per day, i.e. 80 more than what was originally planned for." He was quick to add that the government had encouraged farmers to grow the sugar cane to provide raw materials to the two major sugar companies nearby, in Kom Ombo and Edfu.

By 1985, one third of the land cultivated was sugar cane. "*This* is why people started to feel the pinch of the water shortage during that year," explained Hussein. Further, the land was not levelled *uniformly* over the newly reclaimed areas, which meant that pumps had to work harder to get water to higher levels. As a result, lower plots got too much water.

According to Hisham Abdallah, director of the Osiris Centre for Community Development, which has been closely involved in efforts to deal with the plight of the people of the valley, however, the serious drought came about *later on*. "The problem started when people started buying pieces of land around four villages in the Radisiya area. The new owners started to dig *their own* irrigation channels, depriving the original farmers of their fare share."

Hussein does not deny the fact. "In 1990, the Ministry of Agriculture established the Upper Egyptian Agricultural Company, which sold land outside the original acreage. They added in the contracts of sale that they were not responsible for the supply of water to the land. They sold 40,000 feddans, 21,000 of which were marked for reclamation. Ten thousand have actually been reclaimed." Inevitably, new landowners set their sights on the water canals feeding the original plots.

"They put in their pipes and their pumps *and suck out our water,*" *said Abdel-Azim,* shaking his fist. "The canal by my land is totally dry and so I cannot grow anything. It must be because they [the new landowners] are more important. We are only poor refugees."

Mohamed Kishk, professor at Minya University and author of *Land and Water in Egypt: A Study in the Use and Management of Resources in Egyptian Agriculture* (Minya University Press, 1994) documents similar cases. Kishk indicates that in general there is a lack of basic information, research and development studies, as well as a lack of coordination between various authorities concerned with land reclamation. For example, the first concrete Egyptian land survey in 1964 was undertaken after reclamation had already started on *400,000 feddans. The first* comprehensive study on water resources was only completed in 1989.

Kishk's findings tie in to recent Food and Agriculture Organisation figures, which indicate that in 1989 the actual area of land irrigated in Egypt was 2.6 million hectares, implying that the total surface of irrigated land has not increased since 1961, when construction of the Aswan Dam began. Reasons could include the fact that 100,000 hectares have been mined for *mud bricks while more than* 125,000 hectares were urbanised during the same period.

Further, despite ample land reclamation activity — 1993 government statistics indicate that 690,000 feddans have been reclaimed. Kishk indicates that statistics regarding total areas of land reclaimed do not correlate to profitability, *which,* he claims, does not justify the cost of reclamation.

There is the bigger picture to consider as well. "We have a water quota of 55 and a half billion square metres, which was established when our population was around half of what it is today. Today we are below the poverty line as far as the water quota per person is concerned," commented a senior official at the Ministry of Irrigation, who requested anonymity. "According to international standards, individuals should have access to at least 1,000 square metres of water per year. Average figures in Egypt are 800 square metres."

Kishk summarises the effects of these facts on agriculture as follows: "It's a recurrent situation: complaints, requests [for more water], and a solution — but the farmers do not know whether they got their fair share of water, or other people's fair share."

Hussein explains that the water canals were *built along the higher side of the land.* Recently sold land, however, is to the left of the canal, and hence more elevated, requiring pumps to lift the water. "This constitutes an illegal diversion of water and deprives the villages towards the end of the canal. Since 1988, we have taken constant action against these violations but it is of no use," he lamented.

According to Law 12/1984 on Irrigation *and Drainage,* legal *action* against such violations is restricted to the removal of the offending pipe or pump at the expense of the violator. "Unfortunately no prison sentences are stipulated. So we sometimes charge a violator up to LE500 to remove an offending pipe, but do you think a farmer is going to let his crops die? No. He just puts another pipe in."

The wrath of the people of Zagaluna is directed not only at the owners of the new land but the officials of the Ministry of Irrigation, who, they feel, have not taken decisive action in their favour. "What do we have to do to get these officials to realise that we are starving to death, that we are desperate?" demanded Ahmed Hussein. Abdel-Azim added: "I saw the irrigation engineer the other day while eating my daily loaf of bread. He said *to me 'Abdel-Azim, what are you doing?'* and I answered, 'I am eating plain bread and drinking salt water. This is what you have brought us to'."

On the other side of the fence, irrigation officials complain of limited resources. "At the Nile Water Pumping Station, for example, we are dealing with machines which are thirty years old — their life expectancy is long over. It takes about two years to get an order for a spare part processed. Do you realise how debilitating *that is?" said Hussein.*

Despite such constraints, plans for the future are underway. "In 1985, the ministry launched a five-year study project funded by the US Agency for International Development. In 1990, we started a project which includes the building of a second pumping station, funded by the World Bank, which will be functional in December (Nile Station II), and a project to turn open canals into closed pipelines to conserve water — 90 per cent of which has been completed along the Wadi Abadi Canal (10.50km long) and a new Radisiya water pump which will solve the problem on the *Radisiya water canal (22.50km* long)." Tests on the latter began last week; the inhabitants were disappointed.

"They tried out the machines and still the water did not reach the last four villages," reported *the Osiris Centre's Abdallah, who* witnessed the events. Hussein points out that, for the water station to become effective, the Nile II station must become operational. "When all of this comes together, the water quota of the whole area will be doubled. Today in Radisiya we need 13,000 square kilometres of water. We have planned for 14,000." Why is it taking so long? "The money. The Radisiya plant, for example, cost 20 million pounds and was funded by the Islamic Bank. It took a long time to get that money," explained Hussein.

The efforts of the *Ministry of Irrigation* are lost on the people of Zagaluna, however. "This is not the future we hoped and worked for," says Ahmed Hussein. "We were promised six feddans when we were moved from Wadi Halfa. Then we were given a ration book." He pulls out the old document. The last figure registered: LE5 and 16 piastres in 1969. "The money they gave us was not enough. We would work other people's land for 18 piastres a day to stay alive. We were finally given this land in 1972. Today, we are still poor and, for all it is worth, *landless.*"

The inhabitants were encouraged to take out loans from the Agricultural Bank with which they could dig wells and install pumps as an alternative water source. "We ate the loans," said Fawziya. Money was used to either satisfy dire food needs or was spent on pumps which proved futile. "Now we are being asked *to* pay back the money. Well, we can't. Maybe if they send us to jail as they are threatening to do, we will find someone to feed us," she said.

Villagers are trying to organise their ranks. At a village meeting, old men listen to young women arguing their points of *view, children crowd* around and listen attentively, men and women engage in heated debates on the best way to address the issue and the latest developments. "We want the press to come and listen. We want to feel that people in this country care about us," said Fouad.

Abdallah has suggested the establishment of an NGO *that* would be involved in community development although he acquiesced that, "when we went to start the procedures we were told that all NGOs could undergo major changes with the new law, so we will have to wait."

Experts worry that Zagaluna is not only an example of present water problems, but a hint of future water shortage scenarios. Hussein emphasises: "All *over* the country, there are indications: in Kafr Al-Sheikh, the rice *crises and the decisions* that have *cut down* on rice and sugar cane cultivation. Also diplomatic manoeuvres with Nile Basin countries. All of this is very relevant," he concluded.

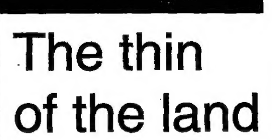
But the people of Zagaluna have had enough. "If they do not have water to give us then they should send us back to where we came from," said Hussein angrily. "I am not going on another wild goose chase to Toshka or anywhere else. They told me to reclaim this land and I reclaimed it with my life. Give me the water. It is mine, after all."







Land of bitter oranges: The drought has left the inhabitants of Zagaluna with no place to go.
Top: Ratiba Salah Hassan: "It is a tough life, but I do it for my children."
Clockwise from above: "This is not the future we hoped for"; pipelines give no water; surveying the devastation; sheaves of petitions, kept close at hand night and day



The thin of the land

Ratiba Salah Hassan, in her fifties, is a *sweet-natured* woman despite the harshness of her life. It is with an obliging smile that she begins to tell her tale, sitting on the dirt floor of her one-room home.

"I was 19 when we were moved from Wadi Halfa. *Nasser was gathering his people back into a country* which had been freed. We were promised land and support," she begins. "Our homes were very nice in Halfa, and we had livestock and everything, but we thought we would start a new life in Egypt and we were *hopeful.*"

The first stop for her clan was Esna. "The land was so bad we could not plant it. The government gave us some help but it soon stopped and we had to take jobs for 18 piastres a day." The demotion to day workers was *painful, but hope was* rekindled when a prominent member of the Aswan Governorate decided to find a solution.

"We were brought to this area, which was being reclaimed. It was all desert and so salty. I remember that new earthenware water jugs used to crack in a month because of the salt. Once, I was giving birth and needed water that was not salty. I had to suck a water melon." Those were difficult times, but Ratiba and family worked hard, and in three years they were harvesting their first crops.

It was the beginning of a better — if not more leisurely — life. In the course of the following years, Ratiba went on to have eight children. "I work in the fields — I do everything, from planting to sowing to harvesting. Then I bake the weekly bread and take care of the livestock. It is a tough life, but I do it for my children. I want them to be so much better than *what they are." She remembers when her infant son* was sick and she did not have enough money to go to a doctor. "He was bleeding for four days and I didn't know what to do." She panics just remembering the incident. "My pillows are still stained with the blood."

She stretches out her hand. "Everything I tell you is true. I just wish one of the officials who passes by here all the time would look at us with quarter of an eye."

When the current problem began in Zagaluna, Ratiba was one of the first to search for solutions. "The government said go to Abu Simbel and I did, but the land was *full* of stones and *scorpions. It took us six* hours to get there, standing in a big truck. It was terrible." Then there were similar trials at Wadi Kabrit and Al-Nuqra, where, "when the water level rose, it flooded our crops and when it receded, our land *turned to desert." So it was* back to Zagaluna.

"My husband has had to go to Tiskha [Toshka] to search for some money. I felt so bad because the last time he came back I could only send him away with two loaves of bread and an onion," she says with a deep sigh. Ratiba carries the burden of her family with resilience. "I am responsible for two sons and their wives and children as well as five other *children.*"

Tears start to well up in her eyes, however, when she starts describing the room around her. "As you can see, we are crammed in here. We have no trenches for sewage." She gets up and goes outside. "Here," she says pointing at a hole in the ground between her house and the neighbours'. "This is our bathroom, which we share with the neighbours. When the container *fills, one of the girls carries it on her head,* and has to walk five kilometres out of town to dump it. This happens about every five days."

To get drinking water these days, the local women have to walk for half an hour to the nearest pump.

Sometimes it is too much for Ratiba. "I will tell you that sometimes, lying in bed, I beg God for death. I can't stand to see my children like this."

But most *of the time, the fighter in her prevails.* "I understand what is happening — I am a *bint balad.* When things got sweet somebody else wanted it — and got it. We are only poor people. I have been reduced to begging for work wherever I can get it, even if it means working on the land of the people who have deprived my children. Everyone talks about the importance of reclamation. They are going to reclaim Toshka. Well, how about this land?"

Ratiba wants water — but there is more. "I want a health facility and a sewage trench and a school." She smiles and looks at a young woman sitting beside her. "I want a workshop for these young women so they can do decent work," she adds. "Oh, and don't forget I also want something in which my families can dip their bread."

Edited by **Pascale Ghazaleh**

World Cup shots

Weak in defence

SOUTH AFRICAN coach Philippe Troussier admitted that his team may be caught short in defence in the World Cup. "I know we'll be weak there, but I have concentrated on the strong points of the team," the Frenchman said when he named a squad of 22 which contained no surprises.

Troussier admitted he would miss the defensive strength of John Moeti and Eric Tinkler, who have been ruled out through injury. "I believe I have 14 key players and the rest will provide good cover," he added.

Ronaldo against AIDS

STAR BRAZILIAN striker Ronaldo, world soccer player of the year, has joined a United Nations campaign to slow the spread of the HIV virus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) among youth, a UN statement said.

The 21-year-old called for young men and women to protect themselves against the deadly virus. Ronaldo has donated a poster carrying his signature and the message "Play Safe!" to the education and protection campaign, according to the UNAIDS programme which groups six UN agencies.

"As a young person, I am very aware of the threat of this virus, and I believe that I can play an important role in standing up to this threat. It is up to us, the young people of the world, to make a difference," Ronaldo was quoted as saying.

"So many young men and women my age think that if they know their partner, they won't get infected. But it just isn't true. "We need to protect ourselves and our partners each and every time. When I play to win, I play safe!"

Beefed up team

DIEGO MARADONA'S father no longer does the cooking but Argentina's World Cup squad is still planning to eat a huge amount of beef during the finals. "We're going to deliver half a tonne of meat to their training camp," said Jorge Santamarina, owner of the Camarcarne Argentina meat-importing firm supplying the squad. This is the equivalent of 33 head of cattle."

Beef, the staple diet of Argentines, is something the twice World Cup winners cannot do without for the month or so they will spend in France.

The half-tonne consignment is intended to keep the Argentine delegation in beef from their arrival in France until the 12 July final. They will use refrigeration facilities to store the meat at their World Cup headquarters in L'Etrat on the outskirts of St Etienne.

Pact on hooligans

BRITISH FANS who cause trouble at the World Cup will be barred from returning to France for the rest of the tournament under a new bilateral agreement, Home Secretary Jack Straw said.

Sixty-five of Britain's worst soccer troublemakers have already had restriction orders imposed on them to prevent them from attending the World Cup, Straw told a news conference.

Straw, Britain's interior minister, said that under the new agreement with France, any British hooligan convicted of a football related offence during the World Cup will have a restriction order imposed in addition to any punishment handed down by the French judiciary.

"I have sought to ensure that we do everything we can help to ensure that those who are decent and law-abiding are able to watch football in safety and comfort," Straw said. One of the first measures Straw took last year to try to prevent British fans, who have a long history of soccer violence, from disrupting the World Cup was to encourage judges to use restriction orders when convicting anyone of a soccer-related crime.

Only nine were in place when he announced the initiative and Straw said he expected the number of orders to have increased from the current 65 as the World Cup begins.

Many cases of soccer violence are still passing through the courts and other disruptive fans may be arrested at other matches before then, he said.

Anyone who has had a restriction order imposed must report to their local police station while any England match is being played during the World Cup. If they fail to do so, they face up to six months in prison.

Moore's medals

THE FOOTBALL Association and the National Football Museum will team up in a bid to keep former England captain Bobby Moore's World Cup winners' medal from falling into foreign hands.

Moore's first wife Tina, who lives in the United States, has put the medal from England's 1966 World Cup victory and other soccer memorabilia up for sale and there are fears the trophies could end up overseas. Most of the money for the bid, expected to be more than two million pounds ($3.3 million), would come from the proceeds of the hugely popular national lottery.

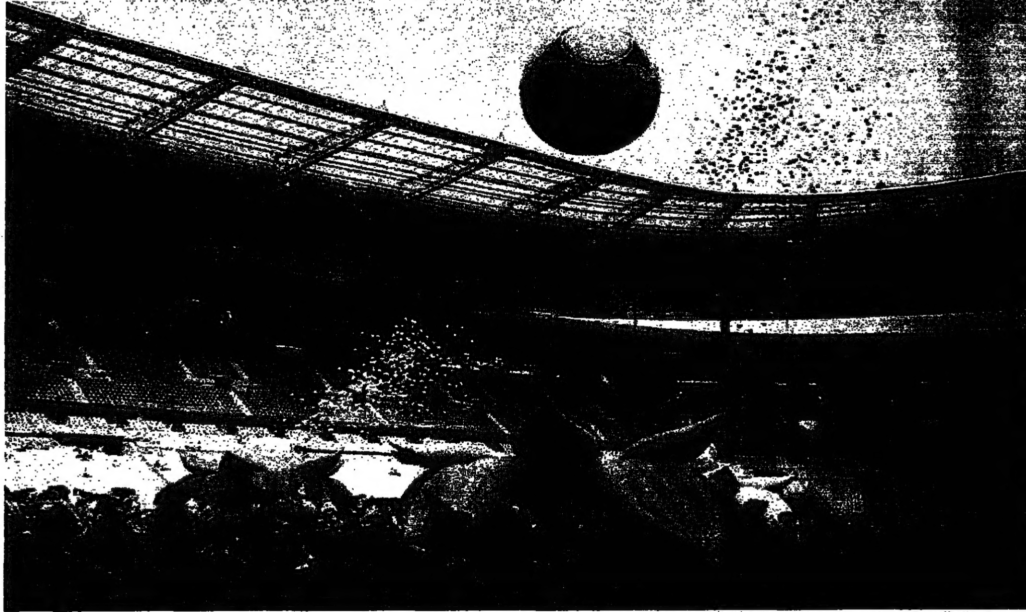
Sports Minister Tony Banks has expressed general support for using lottery money to save the memorabilia for the nation.

"I think there's a strong case. Moore's medals mean a lot to many people," he said in February.

Moore, hero of England's World Cup victory in 1966, left his trophy collection to Tina after they parted in the early 1980s.

He died of cancer in 1993, aged 51.

The proceeds would go to the couple's grown-up children Roberta and Dean.



Rehearsal for the opening ceremony *(photos: AFP)*

The beautiful game in Paris

FRANCE IS PLAYING host to the largest and most complex World Cup finals ever staged, praying that hooligans and terrorism do not ruin the party.

The stakes could hardly be higher as the French welcome an estimated half a million foreign visitors for the 32-nation event. The 10 June to 12 July tournament will also attract a staggering total television audience of some 37 billion as "the beautiful game" is beamed around the globe.

The French government has ploughed some 9.4 billion francs ($1.58 billion) into the event and aims to portray itself as a modern and vibrant nation.

"For some days, France will be at the centre of attention for the whole world, host to the entire planet," French President Jacques Chirac said this week. "Our welcome must be exceptional and perfect. I hope that everyone will display a spirit of responsibility," he added.

But the omens are not good.

The security threat seems real enough as France announced last week that it had unravelled a fundamentalist Islamic guerrilla network as it prepared to throw a massive security net around the tournament.

World Cup organisers, who have spent more than five years getting ready, have already scored a public relations own goal over ticket distribution.

The European Commission is threatening the CFO organising committee with a hefty fine, accusing it of earmarking too many tickets for sponsors, VIPs and for sale in France. Less than a third of the 2.6 million tickets were sold abroad, prompting fears that a black market will emerge and disrupt plans to segregate rival fans.

This World Cup will be the first to feature 32 teams, up from 24 in the United States four years ago. The logistical challenge has been heightened by the decision to make finalists play their three initial group matches at 10 different venues.

Organisers played down the problems this would pose, citing the country's sophisticated transport links.

Those fans will prefer to focus on the activities of strikers such as Ronaldo, the world's top player. Brazil will be looking for an unprecedented fifth title and will be bidding to repeat their unique achievement of 1958 in Sweden when they became the only country to win the tournament outside their own continent.

France have high hopes, too, and are bidding to become the first hosts to win the World Cup since Argentina in 1978.

Besides Brazil, the tournament features all the previous champions apart from Uruguay. Germany, who last won the World Cup in 1990, are again tipped strongly although their ageing team may be past its best.

The French have mobilised 7,000 police for World Cup duty while magistrates will be on duty around the clock to send troublemakers to prison.

The tournament is expected to rake in receipts of over 2.4 billion francs ($400 million) and an operating profit is forecast, although this would not have been possible without heavy investment by the French state.

There can, of course, be only one winner on the pitch come 12 July but the French fervently hope their efforts off the field are crowned with success.

> The Egyptian TV will broadcast all the games on channels two and three plus the sports channel that will be launched with the beginning of the World Cup and which will broadcast all the games live. If three matches are played a day, they will be broadcast at 15:00, 18:00 and 22:00 hours. If two matches will be played a day, they will be broadcast at 15:00 and 18:00 hours Cairo local time.

Gate-crashers could spoil party

THOUSANDS OF POLICE are undergoing special training, anti-terrorist squads are working overtime and first-aid teams are rehearsing their emergency drills.

It is not only the players who have prepared themselves for the biggest soccer event in history. "The World Cup should be first and foremost a party, but to make sure it's a success, security will be fundamental," French Interior Minister Jean-Pierre Chevenement said.

Police fear numerous gate-crashers might be planning to spoil the party, from fundamentalist guerrillas to mindless hooligans.

To counter the risks, France has mobilised one of its largest security operations since World War II, promising a mixture of overt policing and undercover operations.

"We will go into this World Cup knowing that we have done everything possible to handle the event," said Rene-Georges Querry, a police inspector general who is coordinating security plans for the Interior Ministry.

Security was very tight at the last World Cup in 1994 in the United States but there was very little trouble. By the end of the 52-match tournament, less than 100 people had been arrested.

Nobody expects France to get off so lightly.

"Our biggest security concern this year is undoubtedly terrorism," said Walter Gagg, head of security at soccer's world governing body, FIFA. "The terrorists know there is no bigger platform for them than the World Cup."

Newspapers speculated that a raid on suspected Islamic fundamentalists in Belgium in March uncovered evidence that Algerian guerrillas were preparing a World Cup bombing campaign. Police played down the investigation, saying it had not revealed anything "dramatically worrying," but senior officials said behind-the-scenes probes were continuing.

Crack military units will provide security for teams such as the United States, while armed troops will guard some facilities. "Threats facing France have not yet disappeared," Chevenement said.

Hooliganism could also provide major problems. With France so easily accessible and travel relatively cheap, police fear the competition in June and July might prove irresistible to Europe's army of football thugs. French security officials have been working with their European counterparts for months in a bid to head off violence, identifying troublemakers and making sure crowd control tactics will be deployed at the stadia. French police will maintain a low profile, leaving much of the basic patrolling to 'civilian' stewards.

Some believe the much-publicised problems with ticketing could provide a potential flashpoint. The organising committee CFO has been criticised for its handling of ticket sales, keeping many of the seats for French nationals and reserving only a few for foreign soccer federations. Ticketless fans are being urged not to come to France, but many people are expected to make the trip in the hope of picking up tickets on the black market. This raises the spectre of an explosive mix of fans from different countries mingling together, rather than the usual arrangement of seating according to nationality.



Hooligans haunt the success of the finals

And if they fail to get seats, rival fans are likely to converge on giant television screens being set up in the host cities to show the games. Throw in summer heat and cheap French wine and you have a recipe for trouble.

The Interior Ministry will deploy up to 6,000 police a day on World Cup duty. Among their number will be units of tough riot troops. Magistrates will also be on hand at the grounds to get a close view of trouble before activating a well-established "fast-track" justice system which will see the accused tried and sentenced within 48 hours. Penalties will be tough; up to three years in jail for offences including drunken behaviour, violence and incitement.

In addition, plainclothed "spotters" will come from around Europe to help the French to hunt down known hooligans. "We will find them, we always do," a senior British police officer, Chief Superintendent Eddy Curtis, said.

Fact file

1. Brazil holds the World Cup record for victories, winning the title four times in 1958, '62, '70, and '94.
2. Germany appeared in most finals, in 1954, '66, '74, '82, '86 and '90.
3. Pele has the greatest number of World Cup winners' medals which he won in 1958, '62 and '70.
4. The youngest player to win a World Cup is Pele. He was 17 years and eight months when Brazil won in Sweden in 1958.
5. The youngest player to play in the World Cup is Norman Whiteside of Northern Ireland. He was only 17 years and 42 days when his team played in Spain in 1982.
6. The oldest player to win a World Cup is Italian goalkeeper Dino Zoff. He was 42 years and four months in Spain 1982.
7. Brazil is the only country which competed in all 16 World Cup finals.
8. Mexico's goalkeeper Antonio Carbajal competed in the most World Cup finals. He competed in 1950, '54, '58, '62 and in '66. He will be equaled in France '98 by Germany's Lothar Matthans who competed in 1982, '86, '90, '94 and this year.
9. The following players competed in most matches in World Cup finals; Germany's Uwe Seeler and Lothar Matthaus, Poland's Wladislaw Zmuda and Argentina's Diego Maradona have all played in 21 matches.
10. Gerd Muller of Germany scored a record total of 14 goals (10 in 1970 and four in 1974) in the World Cup.
11. As for the top scorer in a World Cup finals, Just Fontaine of France scored 13 goals in Sweden in 1958.
12. Lucien Laurent of France scored the first goal ever in a World Cup finals in 1930.
13. Oleg Salenko of Russia scored the greatest number of goals in a single match in a World Cup, putting five goals in Cameroon's net in 1994.
14. England's Geoff Hurst scored the most goals in a World Cup final. He scored three times in England's 4-2 win against West Germany in the 1996 final.
15. The oldest player to score in a World Cup is Cameroon's Roger Milla who was 42 years, one month and eight days when he scored against Russia in 1994.
16. The greatest total of goals scored in the World Cup is 146 in Spain in 1982.
17. Brazil has scored the most goals in World Cup matches with 159 goals.
18. The greatest number of goals scored in a single World Cup match is 12 in 1954 when Austria beat Switzerland 7-5.
19. The greatest winning margin in a World Cup match was nine goals. Hungary beat South Korea 9-0 in 1994.
20. The greatest number of goals scored in a World Cup final is seven. Brazil beat Sweden 5-2 in 1958.
21. The quickest goal scored in the World Cup was that of Vavlav Masek of Czechoslovakia, scored in 15 seconds against Mexico in 1962.
22. Hungary scored the most goals in one World Cup, notching 27 goals in 1954.
23. Walter Zenga of Italy has gone the longest in the World Cup without conceding a goal. He went 516 minutes without conceding a goal in the 1990 finals.
24. The quickest time a player was sent off was 55 seconds in 1986 when French referee Joel Quiniou sent off Uruguay's Batista in a match against Scotland for a tackle on Gordon Strachan.
25. The record crowd for a World Cup match was 203,849 for Brazil against Uruguay at the Maracana stadium in Rio in 1950.

or E-mail fasle@hotmail.com

prehensive peace the enemies of peace".

هكذا من الأصل

هكذا من الأصل

Rooting from the sidelines

WHILE EGYPT will not be playing in this World Cup, Egyptians are, nevertheless, as enthusiastic as ever about watching it. The extravaganza is impatiently awaited every four years and, when it finally arrives, is considered a month-long festival throughout the nation.

Coffee-shops with TV sets line up chairs for customers, five-star hotels in Cairo and in resorts put up huge screens for spectators. Quite a few better off Egyptians have even flown to host nation France, although not all have tickets to the games. Some soft drink enterprises in Egypt have offered trips to France, which include airline tickets and accommodation, as promotional prizes.

Traditionally, Egyptians root for Arab and African teams in any World Cup. This year, they will have five countries to cheer on: Tunisia, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, South Africa and Nigeria have all made it to France.

Tunisia knocked Egypt out in the World Cup qualifiers. Bad blood aside, the team, playing in its second World Cup, will need as much support as it can get, having been grouped with England, Colombia and Romania. Still, the Tunisians have the potential for an upset. They did the Arab world proud when they became the first Arab team to win a match in the World Cup, beating Mexico 3-1 in 1978.

Morocco, grouped with Norway, Scotland and Brazil, was the first Arab country to reach the second round of the World Cup in 1986, finishing the top of its group, another first. Hard pressed to repeat, Morocco does have the experience — this is its fourth trip to the World Cup — and several players in French, Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese clubs.

Saudi Arabia's World Cup debut, in 1994, saw it reach the second round before losing to Sweden 3-1. Three-time Asian champions, the Saudis scored a major coup recently when they hired Brazilian World Cup-winning coach Carlos Alberto. Alberto will have his hands full in a group that includes hosts France, Denmark and South Africa.

Conflicting African and Arab identities might clash as Egyptians decide who to cheer for when World Cup debutantes South Africa play Saudi Arabia. South Africa, runners up to Egypt in this year's African Nations Cup, is well-known for perseverance and determination. Only time will tell if that will help.



Saudi Arabia's team in training *(photos: AFP)*

Cameroon would like to conjure up its 1990 feat, when the 'Indomitable Lions' grabbed the headlines by beating Argentina in the opening match, then became the first African team to make it to the quarter finals. But their fortunes reversed dramatically in 1994 when they dropped out of the first round, garnering just one point. This time Cameroon share Group B with Austria, Chile, and Italy. A successful run of pre-cup friendlies could propel the lions to the second round.

Nigeria's 'Super Eagles' stunned the football world when it almost knocked out Italy in the second round before bowing out to a late goal. This time around, the eagles are in the so-called "group of death". With Bulgaria, Spain and Paraguay, the eagles might not fly as high or as far as in 1994.

As for our own national team, which reached the World Cup twice, in 1934 and 1990, Egyptians hope it won't be too long before they get there again. In the meantime, cheering on other teams will have to do for now.

Getting bigger, but is it better?

THE WORLD CUP, the biggest footballing jamboree ever, with an expected total television audience in the billions and a record 32 teams competing, has kicked off after months of anticipation.

Tickets, security and transport strikes have taken a higher profile than the football build-up for the extravaganza, which ends 12 July. Now it's time for the players to come to the fore in this greatest of all football pageants.

Governments have fallen, fans have died, marriages have been wrecked and friendships ruined in the wake of World Cup results and the nervous tension will be just as frantic this time.

Colombia's Andres Escobar was killed following an own goal in the 1994 World Cup to illustrate how the form of an international footballer is a life or death business.

Traditionalists believe the competition is devalued by having 32 teams compared with 24 last time and 16 way back in 1978, believing low calibre teams now feature.

And they may be right that expansion is down to politics and profit rather than the aim of incorporating more teams from Africa and Asia for the good of the game.

However, surely the Cameroon of 1990 and Nigeria of four years ago added a valuable exuberance to the often serious business of top flight football,

And Jamaica's Caribbean crowd, regardless of results, will surely give the finals another side to its cultural richness.

Jamaica, however, are almost certainly not going to win the World Cup. In fact, only six nations have done so — Brazil, Germany, Italy, Argentina, Uruguay and England. The first four are strong favorites with England seen as outsiders.

Hosts France have a slight chance of being the seventh winners, too, as have Spain. Croatia and Yugoslavia have a host of talented players and it will be interesting if they turn sheer technical skill into World Cup success.

The event has been a South America versus Europe contest with the South Americans edging ahead eight wins to seven when Brazil won their fourth tournament in 1994.

There have been 19 European finalists out of 30 but when Andreas Brehme scored from the penalty spot at the Rome Olympic Stadium in 1990 to earn Germany a revenge win over Argentina, it was the first time a European side had beaten a South American one in seven finals.

Brazil have won four of five finals while Germany have regularly proved their durability, reaching six finals and winning three of them. Germany are also the only team to have competed in three successive finals and reached the quarterfinals in all but the 1938 and 1978 events.

Statistics may be interesting but current form is often a better guide. The 1998 World Cup final party could be dancing to the Argentina tango rather than swinging to the Brazil's samba beat if Argentina's good results continue. Argentina finished top of their arduous qualifying series and may benefit without the destabilising influence of the now retired Diego Maradona. Warm up victories over Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and the Irish Republic, however, have only boosted their confidence, but the 1-0 defeat over Brazil in the Maracana stadium on 29 April topped them all.

Coach Daniel Passarella has enforced discipline in his squad by ordering no earrings, long hair or homosexuals and time will tell how effective that policy has been.

Brazil, which also lost to the United States in February as well as the Argentina defeat, look to be heading into the finals with doom and gloom clouds on the horizon. Coach Mario Zagallo, undermined by the appointment of former star Zico as one of his assistants, at first glance seems to have a problem on his hands. A case of too many chiefs? The situation in 1994 was just the same though. In fact, it was Zagallo himself who was appointed amongst the staff of coach Carlos Alberto Parreira. Despite constant criticism from all quarters in Brazil, Parreira managed to quietly endure the torrent of abuse to lift Brazil's fourth world title. And a team with the likes of Ronaldo, Roberto Carlos, Denilson and even without the injured Romario must surely have a strong chance of making it five titles.

Germany, which fell 1-2 to Brazil in March, have an ageing squad with Jurgen Kohler, Thomas Helmer, Thomas Hassler, Andreas Moller and Jurgen Klinsmann all on or over 30. Lother Matthaus, their World Cup winning captain of 1990, raised the average age when he was called into the squad in their dour 0-0 draw with Finland late last month. The 37-year-old was called up for his fifth World Cup finals because Matthias Sammer, their heroic sweeper in their successful Euro '96 campaign, failed to recover from recurring knee injuries.

On a better note, Oliver Bierhoff, who topped the scorers in Italy with 27 goals for Udinese this season, scored six in the qualifiers and his consistent strike rate must be a major trump card in France '98.

Italy, which reached the 1994 final after just scraping through from their group and coming back from behind in later rounds, can never be discounted. They made things hard for themselves in qualifying but their strength in all departments must give them a good chance.

The football purists will be hoping, regardless of who wins France '98, that the tournament will be remembered for its exciting football. Over the years, goals have dried up as organisation rather than inspiration has become the trend. Just compare Brazil's champions in 1970 and 1994.

So now begins the force that rocks the world every four years, getting bigger and bigger each time they put up the nets.

Ticketing discrimination: France wins

A FRENCH COURT admitted that the ticket policy by the World Cup organisers was unfair, but it could do nothing about it.

A Paris court last week threw out the case brought by 32 members of the European Parliament demanding that French World cup organisers redistribute more than 700,000 tickets to give foreign fans a better chance of getting seats.

The MPs, mainly British, Dutch and Germans, were part of an international chorus of protesters accusing the French organising committee, CFO, of discrimination. They said the decision to sell only a third of the 2.5 million tickets available outside the country hosting the World Cup favoured French fans.

The court admitted that the ticket sales were not fairly organised because the organising committee favoured residents of France. But it could not handle the case because the MPs who filed it were not personally disadvantaged since they had not tried to buy the tickets themselves.

"To take the ticket matter to court, one can only seek tickets for oneself," Phillip Jenkinson, attorney for the 32 lawmakers said while explaining the court's ruling. "By asking for 700,000 tickets, we were asking the court to change the law."

At the first hearing, Jenkinson had said that the CFO's ticket policy contravened three clauses in the Treaty of Rome, which outlaws discrimination on grounds of nationality, restraint of movement of goods and services, and abuse of dominant position.

The parliamentarians had also asked the Paris court to pass on the complaint to the European Court of Justice as the way was still open for other challenges from EU citizens.

However, the court said that access was equitable to all the fans and that there was a possibility for citizens to seek redress individually.

Although it was too late to redistribute the tickets, the court's admission of unfairness in the system could ensure that future event organisers avoid such discrimination.

For now, the direct beneficiaries of the policy are European citizens, black market dealers and French authorities. For European fans, the ticket system will not be a big problem since it is relatively easier to go to France from Europe than from outside. They will still be able to get the tickets through legal channels within France, or through the black market.

The system also saved French authorities from the pressure of dealing with large numbers of fans from all over the world.

But the French should expect headache from English fans who were determined to travel to France at all costs. The British government advised football fans to stay home if they had not bought tickets yet. But the English Football Supporters Association (EFS) said it was unrealistic to expect fans not to travel.

"It doesn't matter what you tell people," said Alison Pilling, international officer of the EFS. "People who have travelled abroad before know that black market tickets are always available and I think our view on that is to give advice on the basis of what people are going to do."

Of course relying on the black market could be a very risky business. A London company was shut down after it failed to deliver, having sold 40,000 World Cup tickets raking in £2.4 million.

Meanwhile in Cameroon, the president of the country's football federation, Vincent Onana, was reported to have been charged with trafficking World Cup tickets. He allegedly sold tickets from the Federation's allocation to a London-based entertainment company.

Cameroon's judicial authorities opened an investigation into the matter which could prevent 3,000 Cameroon supporters from receiving their tickets for France '98.

Demand for tickets has been soaring as the kick-off of the world's biggest football event neared. There were reports of ticket offers on many internet message boards and electronic mail. Prices varied from about $200 for a standard first round match to $13,000 for premium seats at the final.

Official ticket prices or the final on July 12 are between $70 and $590 while first round match tickets are between $25 and $60. But the going price for seats at the opening match between Brazil and Scotland was a minimum of $400.

Two olés in Paris

SPANIARDS Moya and Sanchez won the men's and women's French Open crowns at Roland Garros

Spain's Carlos Moya cruised past compatriot Alex Corretja 6-3, 7-5, 6-3 to win the French Open crown and complete a double for his country at Roland Garros. In the women's event, Arantxa Sanchez Vicario collected her third French Open trophy after beating triple champion Monica Seles 7-6, 0-6, 6-2 and proclaiming it a major boost for the "older generation."

In the mixed doubles finals Venus Williams/ Justin Gimelstob (US) beat Serena Williams (US)/ Luis Lobo (Argentina) 6-4, 6-4.

At 26, Sanchez, the Spanish world No. 5, was competing in her 12th consecutive French Open and, in a sport dominated by teenagers, is already considered a veteran. Beaten finalist Seles is 24 but her first of three titles here came eight years ago when she was only 16.

"I am so happy," Sanchez said after her victory. "I think this (win) is good for women's tennis. I think we will meet in the future many more times and I think that is great for the sport."

King Juan Carlos of Spain was in the stand to see his nation's dominance of the grand slam event this year.





photo: Reuters

World Cup shots

Blatter president of FIFA

JOSEPH BLATTER beat Lennart Johansson and became president of FIFA, winning the first round vote 111-80. Left short of the necessary two-thirds majority, Johansson withdrew after the first round vote. The decisive decision as to which of the two men rules the most powerful governing body of football was entirely up to the African countries who voted in favour of Blatter. President of the African Confederation Issa Hayatou tried earlier to convince the African countries to back Johansson but failed.

TV set sales soar

SALES OF TELEVISION sets in Europe have soared since the start of the year in anticipation of the World Cup soccer championships, industry sources said. The sales have risen most in countries which qualified for the tournament, they said, and involve mostly expensive sets loaded with features.

According to France's Audiovisual and Electronic Industrial Materials Union, sales of sets climbed 20.3 per cent from January to April and video cassette recorder sales were up 21.6 per cent in the same period. This is directly tied to the World Cup because the seasonality is reversed. "Normally, 50 per cent of sales happen just before the end of the year holidays," a union official said.

The sound of success

GERMAN COACH Bertie Vogts will use classical music to help him relax during the World Cup finals. "I'll have my sound system with me and my CDs, almost all of them classical," Vogts said. "That way I can completely relax for an hour."

Vogts said it was tough living up to the German public's high expectations in a major tournament like the World Cup. "Many people underestimate our opponents completely," he told Germany's SID sports news agency. "The difference between teams in world football is much smaller than it used to be. I know that and I'm prepared for it. Unfortunately, only a few people in Germany know it."

Germany play the US, Yugoslavia and Iran in Group F.

Tennis prohibited

AT SOUTH AFRICA'S training camp in Obertal in Germany's Black Forest, coach Philippe Troussier banned his players from the tennis courts with the threat of a 5,000 rand ($1,000) fine. "Tennis is a dangerous sport and it would be catastrophic if one of the players got hurt on the court," Troussier was quoted as saying.

He said golf or bicycling through the countryside were more acceptable forms of recreation.

Banks won't use tickets

BRITISH SPORTS Minister Tony Banks won't use his World Cup tickets as a protest against the way tickets have been allocated. He termed the ticketing system "a mess".

"I have got tickets," he said. "I actually am not going to go — quite deliberately not going to go — out to protest because of the way the (ticket) system operates, or doesn't operate."

Banks said he would instead watch the World Cup on big screens with "a lot of other people."

Judge lets Maradona fly

A JUDGE PROBING Diego Maradona for allegedly shooting four reporters with an air rifle granted the former Argentina captain permission to leave his country for 15 days to go to the World Cup finals.

Judge Dante Pietrafesa decided that Maradona will be allowed to leave the country as he has several times before and during the investigation into the incident in 1994, a court spokeswoman told the state-run Telam news agency.

Lawyers for four journalists are seeking a four-year prison term for Maradona, 37, for allegedly shooting them with an air rifle in February 1994. Pietrafesa is due to reach a verdict on the case within 20 days.

The team to beat

EUROPEANS ARE expecting Brazil to beat Germany in the World Cup final, a Dutch market research agency said. In a survey of 2,800 people in Belgium, France, Spain, Germany, Italy, Britain and the Netherlands, 24 percent said they believed Brazil would win on 12 July. Germany and Italy were joint second favourites with 12 percent of the poll, followed by France, England and Spain. Argentina and the Netherlands tied in seventh place.

The survey said respondents had a bias towards their own nation, with an average 30 percent predicting a win for their country. Italians were the most optimistic — 52 percent expected Italy to win — while the French were the most pessimistic, with only 17 percent predicting a home victory. Women were more patriotic than men. More men named Brazil as likely winners.

World Cup special pages prepared by sports editor **Inas Mazhar** and sports staff, **Nashwa Abdel-Tawab** (from Paris), **Abeer Anwar**, **Eman Abdel-Moeti** and **Dalia El-Henawi**

Al-Ahram Weekly

11 - 17 June 1998

Aliyya El-Bindari:

Good will hunting

Common sense and compassion are the ingredients. To her, serious problems are made to be solved, with love and inexhaustible energy



On Sidi Bishr beach in Alexandria, almost half a century ago, a very small girl in a pink and white flowered bathing suit with a beautiful ruffle played in the waves. While building her sand castles, she would steal glances toward the cabins. Suddenly she'd smile, and run happily towards a family just arriving with many children in tow. At first the little girl would ignore the members of the family and just extend her hands toward a chubby baby in its nanny's arms. The baby would smile, then gurgle. "Yes, you are beautiful," the little girl would coo back, making funny faces to the infant. Her eyes would twinkle and she would give the mother such an irresistible smile that it never failed to earn her the right to hold the baby. She did so very carefully, although the load was almost too heavy for her. She would sit on the sand for a long time, her arms wrapped around the small child, whispering little nothings into her ear, careful that no sand came into her eyes. Even when she had to surrender her charge to the nanny, she stayed around, neglecting her older sister and all her friends. The little girl was Aliyya El-Bindari, whom everyone called Poulette; the baby was my sister, who invariably shrieked every time I attempted to hold her, which I never felt like doing unless I saw her sitting happily on Poulette's lap.

The little girl lived in Alexandria and, after that summer in Sidi Bishr, our paths never crossed, although news of her reached me from time to time. When we finally met, so many years later, I recognised her at once. She had the same curls, the same quick smile which made her eyes dance, and the same diminutive size. A career, a marriage, two children and a great deal of travel have fully developed the whirlwind qualities one could only guess at in the way she always skipped and jumped rather than walked when she was a child. The bottled-up energy has been channelled into many activities. El-Bindari does half a dozen things at the same time, continuously moves around, and talks non-stop. At the end of the day, she has accomplished everything she had set out to do.

Her apartment is a pure reflection of her personality, although, she informs me at once, her daughter decorated it. The flowers, the colours, the fabrics and the wood blend, then burst into a magnificent symphony which she seems to be orchestrating. Two exuberant miniature poodles, one black, the other white, constantly chase each other, their nails scrabbling madly on the gleaming wood floors. They are, one sees at once, the natural extensions of their owner's animation. Situated on the top floor of a high rise on the outskirts of Maadi, the duplex has a breathtaking view of the Nile, the city and the Pyramids beyond. El-Bindari, however, points at the slums of Dar El-Salam just below. "Look at the poor people who must live in these insalubrious surroundings. One day I'll be back, and I will see to it that they get the care they need."

That is where it all started. El-Bindari, a pampered ambassador's daughter, has worried for as long as she can remember about the poor, the destitute, the needy and the downtrodden of the world. Early on, she found a way to channel this angst into positive action. "I am a doer," she says, "not so much a thinker."

She started her career studying nursing. She had been fascinated in her childhood by the biography of Florence Nightingale and the stories of all those other women who dedicated their lives to helping the sick and the needy. She had made up her mind about what she would be long before other girls her age had even started gazing dreamily into the future. Her father, who had always advocated women's equality, actively encouraged her professional aspirations. She chose to go and study in the United States, where nursing "was an integral part of the medical profession even then", which was not the case in Egypt.

From Boston University and the Harvard School of Medicine, she returned with a PhD in Public Health. If she decided to put her expertise at the service of women and children the world over, focusing on their health, it was because she had already sensed that, wherever one went, this was the segment of the population most at risk. She came back to Egypt with her brand new credentials, and met her husband. She had always wanted to have children and the idea of marriage appealed to her, provided, of course, it did not interfere with the work that she intended to do. "Ismail," says El-Bindari, "was extremely understanding and, like me, believed that family came first. He himself worked in development, and we made a pact: we would never accept jobs that would force us to live apart." Just after her first child was born, she was offered a job with the World Health Organisation, which entailed going to live in Libya. Ismail had no objections; she accepted immediately. It is therefore with her husband and baby that she arrived in Libya, full of dreams but not really clued on the practicalities of development issues. She was to receive her training in the field, while bringing rudiments of primary health care to a small semi-rural community on the outskirts of Benghazi. This is when she was first struck with the ideas which have formed the basis of her philosophy in development. Her premise was that, as in any other endeavour, a large dose of common sense was necessary in tackling the problems of health and poverty.

One cannot, reasoned El-Bindari, single out one specific element in the development process. Health is but a symptom of poor economic and social conditions and can only be substantially improved if, and when, the quality of life improves. To achieve such a goal, poverty should be attacked on all fronts at the same time. She started dreaming up and applying comprehensive schemes long before they were adopted as fashionable theories expounded by post-modern sociologists.

Two years after her arrival in Libya, El-Bindari was moved to another the WHO office in Indonesia. There, five years of unforgettable experiences awaited her, working in public health and starting an all-encompassing community-based programme which included health improvement through nutrition, education, job creation and children's literacy classes. Several years into the programme, a front page article written by a journalist who reported on her work in Indonesia made El-Bindari an overnight star. Her patience, which bore such wonderful results, had been "publicly recognised", she chuckles. Patience is actually one of El-Bindari's key words. She uses it often and one is startled every time to hear it uttered by someone so ebullient. "Development," she says, "contrary to what many organisations would like to believe, is not like instant coffee. It takes long years of hard work to bring a project to fruition. It is a labour of love, with its ups and downs, its successes and failures. There are no immediate rewards. Many of our programmes were complete failures, but we learned from our mistakes and improved where there was room for improvement."

She gives the example of a family planning programme in Africa, where women were fitted with IUDs. There were no facilities and they had to stand in line in the open, in front of a make-shift family planning clinic. "We had great attendance the first day, then very quickly the lines dwindled." Confronted with the near failure of the programme, El-Bindari, using the common sense she says is always so helpful when dealing with real people, suggested that the women be asked why they resisted this simple method of contraception. "The women said that they felt humiliated standing in front of the clinic as passersby could readily spot female relatives and friends waiting their turn to be fitted with an IUD. There was a great deal of gossip in the village and they did not want everyone to know about their private affairs," explains El-Bindari. Private visits by the clinic's medical staff solved the problem. Fitted with the device in the secrecy of their own homes, the women were no longer reluctant to seek help in avoiding unwanted pregnancies.

El-Bindari never let success — or failure — stop her for long. She had to forge ahead to achieve what her long-term goal had always been: better health for women and children, better quality of life for all without discrimination. Health, mental and physical, was a human right, and she had set out to defend it across the frontiers, eliminating, as she went along, what was not essential to her cause. She had little patience with administrative chores and always favoured work in the field. "Talk to the people, ask them about their needs and their problems, they will tell you specifically, better than any expert. It is their lives that we are attempting to improve, and they have the right to participate in the process of finding the solutions." Often, according to El-Bindari, "schemes are worked out on paper and then applied from above. Many so-called experts have never visited the communities they are theorising about. Should one wonder, then, why these schemes are met with such resounding failure?" El-Bindari has spent most of her time away from well air-conditioned offices, "in the villages, with the poor of the poor, where a glass of clean water is a luxury and where lunch can be a single shared tomato, if one is lucky."

She smiles while reminiscing about some high-profile missions which, on arrival, would ask to be shown to the bathroom, and about the way they looked when informed that there were none. "Before you can help people improve their lives, you have to share their misery to really understand their needs," says El-Bindari. She has been around the world, applying her philosophy of development. She has immense compassion for the women whose burden is the greatest but whose share in the assets of any community is the smallest. She has dedicated her life to empowering women and now, having almost reached the age of retirement, she feels that there is a need for more. Having resigned her post at the WHO, she has launched herself into a teaching career. She lectures on public health at New York University, George Washington and Harvard. Moreover, she is busy establishing programmes which will allow graduate students in Africa and Asia to obtain PhDs from these universities while staying in their own countries. "It will allow a large number of students who, for economic, professional or family reasons, could not possibly afford to spend a few years as full-time students in the States, to earn degrees from prestigious universities, working mainly through the Internet."

El-Bindari spent last winter working on this new project. She will return to Egypt at the end of this month, and plans to settle here. She has been looking at several projects in public health. "There is so much to be done," she sighs, "and here, women are particularly receptive. Right after we got over the silly little knitting and crochet projects, which were never seriously aimed at creating sustainable development, we were on the right track. Now is the time to concentrate on income-generating projects, hand in hand with literacy programmes and health schemes. We have serious problems with the infrastructure and with housing, but nothing a great deal of good will cannot solve."

She is already dreaming of new programmes, tailored to Egyptian community needs, and has put out feelers. "It will work," she says happily. We are back on the balcony. Down there, Dar El-Salam seems to beckon. "I'll be back," she promises.

Profile by **Fayza Hassan**

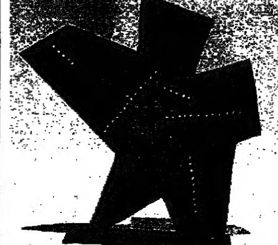
Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris

♠ Attending an exhibition opening in Alexandria is as good a way as any to kick off the summer season. So it was off to the Greek Consulate in Alexandria for the inauguration of the joint-exhibition by **Mona Marzouk** and **Amina Mansour** last Thursday. Imagine, then, my surprise when I found myself hobnobbing with Cairene critics, artists and socialites who had descended on the Second Capital for the opening. The first person I bumped into on arrival was painter **Reda Abdel-Salam** who told me off for being late (as usual) then started waxing lyrical about the exhibition. As I stood peering at one of **Amina Mansour**'s incredibly delicate cotton wool formations, shaped into intricate petals here, an exotic fruit there, someone tapped on my shoulder. Turning round, I found my dear friend **Rashida Taymour** looking as radiant and spiffy as ever. We floated together around the halls and, with my pince-nez firmly propped on the ridge of my nose, I regaled **Rashida** with off-the-cuff insights into the subtle Greek and Ancient Egyptian influence in **Mona**'s witty paintings and installations. Just then, I noticed I was being filmed by Alexandria's television channel 5 and rather hoped they would interview me — which was somewhat presumptuous, as I realised later, when I found out that even the artists had not been interviewed.

♥ It is always difficult to part with friends, even when one is aware that they are on their way to bigger and better things; one should rejoice for them, yet one is still saddened to think that they are moving away. That is why it is with bitter-sweet feelings that I bid **John** and **Joan Westley** good-bye the other day, after having enjoyed their friendship for so long. **John** has been the head of United States Agency for International Development, aka USAID, for the past four years and **Joan** has been teaching English at AUC where — and I have it from an excellent source (no, dears, not the one so fond of leaking White House gossip) — her students are very sorry to see her go. The good news is that the **Westleys** are being transferred to Rome, where **John** will be vice-president of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). In an intimate farewell conversation with a few close friends, **John** said that he had been extremely impressed by some of the people working here in NGOs, and expressed his conviction that their role will become more important in all aspects of our future economic development. Hearing this, I made a note to look immediately for an NGO which will be able to put my versatile talents to good use. I am not one to pass up an opprtunity to invest in the future, as you may well have guessed, my snugglepots. One of the nice aspects of John's job is that, IFAD having several projects underway in Egypt, he will be coming to visit it quite often, so we will not be losing him completely after all. Still, it is with tears in my eyes that I parted with **John** and **Joan**, whispering *arrivederci* and *ciao* in a strangled voice.





Joan and John; one of Henein's sculptures

♣ Good news, my lovelies: you have until 28 June to get your dear little selves to Espace Karim Francis in order to take a close look at **Adam Henein**'s exhibition, Passages, Sculptures and Paintings. If this visit whets your appetite — and if you are fluent in Molière's language besides — then I strongly advise that you proceed to the auditorium of the French Cultural Centre in Mounira on 16 June at 7.00pm precisely to attend a conference on the works of the famous artist.